Commentary
August 1996

What Do American Jews Believe?

A Symposium

David Berger • Saul J. Berman • David R. Blumenthal
Marshall J. Breger • Nina Beth Cardin • David G. Dalin
Elliot N. Dorff • David Ellenson • Michael Fishbane
Barry Freundel • David Gelernter • Marc Gellman
Neil Gillman • David M. Gordis • Arthur Green
Blu Greenberg • Joshua O. Haberman • David Weiss Halivni
Susannah Heschel • Milton Himmelfarb • Lawrence A. Hoffman
Francine Klagsbrun • David Klinghoffer • Peter Knobel
Norman Lamm • Ruth Langer • Daniel Lapin • Julius Lester
Jon D. Levenson • Nathan Lewin • David L. Lieber
Michael Medved • Michael A. Meyer • Jacob Neusner • David Novak
Joseph A. Polak • Dennis Prager • Richard L. Rubenstein
Ismar Schorsch • David Singer • Devora Steinmetz
Suzanne Last Stone • David A. Teutsch • Harlan J. Wechsler
Jack Wertheimer • Eric H. Yoffie • Sheldon Zimmerman

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE • $3.75/$4.50 CANADA • VOLUME 102 • NUMBER 2

An Offering from *ALAN WOFSY FINE ARTS*
Original Graphic Works by Jewish Artists

Abraham Rattner
1895-1978

Feast of Lights, Lithograph. 1971. Signed edition of 120.

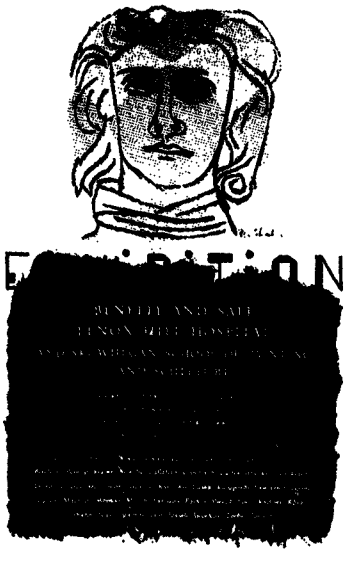
Signed lithographs and original posters. 1966-1975.
Price list and 9 postcard size reproductions - $10.00

Leonard Baskin
The Old Testament Series

Nimrod, Lithograph. Edition of 100.

Original lithographs - 1975
Price list and 10 postcard size reproductions - $10.00

Ben Shahn
1898-1969



Lenox Hill Hospital and Skowhegan School. 1965. Edition of 1,200.

Price list and 3 flyers - $5.00

Jack Levine

Rabbi in White, Lithograph in umber. 1983. Edition of 50.

Price list and flyer - $5.00

1109 Geary Boulevard, San Francisco, CA USA 94109
(415)292-6500 Fax (415)292-6594 e-mail: beauxarts@earthlink.net

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary

Vol. 102 · August 1996 · No. 2

A Symposium

What Do American Jews Believe?

18 *Introduction*
19 *David Berger*
21 *Saul J. Berman*
23 *David R. Blumenthal*
24 *Marshall J. Breger*
26 *Nina Beth Cardin*
27 *David G. Dalin*
29 *Elliot N. Dorff*
30 *David Ellenson*
32 *Michael Fishbane*
34 *Barry Freundel*
35 *David Gelernter*
37 *Marc Gellman*
39 *Neil Gillman*
40 *David M. Gordis*
42 *Arthur Green*
44 *Blu Greenberg*
45 *Joshua O. Haberman*
47 *David Weiss Halivni*
49 *Susannah Heschel*
50 *Milton Himmelfarb*
52 *Lawrence A. Hoffman*
53 *Francine Klagsbrun*
55 *David Klinghoffer*
57 *Peter Knobel*
59 *Norman Lamm*
60 *Ruth Langer*
62 *Daniel Lapin*
63 *Julius Lester*
65 *Jon D. Levenson*
67 *Nathan Lewin*
68 *David L. Lieber*
70 *Michael Medved*
72 *Michael A. Meyer*
74 *Jacob Neusner*
75 *David Novak*
76 *Joseph A. Polak*
78 *Dennis Prager*
80 *Richard L. Rubenstein*
81 *Ismar Schorsch*
83 *David Singer*
84 *Devora Steinmetz*
86 *Suzanne Last Stone*
88 *David A. Teutsch*
89 *Harlan J. Wechsler*
91 *Jack Wertheimer*
93 *Eric H. Yoffie*
95 *Sheldon Zimmerman*

Letters

3
Foreign policy; "Michelin Noir"; containment; Sidney Hook; etc.

Books

97 Democracy's Discontent by Michael J. Sandel *Wilfred M. McClay*
100 Franz Liszt by Alan Walker *Terry Teachout*
102 God Has Ninety-Nine Names by Judith Miller *David Pryce-Jones*
104 How Many People Can the Earth Support? by Joel E. Cohen *Charles T. Rubin*
106 Nietzsche by Peter Berkowitz *Adam Schulman*
110 Pop Internationalism by Paul Krugman *Christopher Caldwell*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editor Neal Kozodoy
Managing Editor Brenda Brown
Senior Editor Gabriel Schoenfeld
Associate Editor Saul Rosenberg
Editor-at-Large Norman Podhoretz
Publisher Jonathan R. Cohen
Advertising Director Sarah M. Stern
Circulation Manager Mark Schiffer

COMMENTARY (ISSN 0010-2601) is published monthly by the American Jewish Committee—EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES: 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022 Telephone: (212) 751-4000. Fax: (212) 751-1174. E-MAIL: 103115.2375@compuserve.com. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Single copy is $3.75; $39 a year, 2 years $72, 3 years $105—Add $8.00 per year for all foreign subscriptions, including Canada and Latin America. For subscription information call: (800) 829-6270—Second-class postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to COMMENTARY, 165 East 56th Street, New York, NY 10022.

Copyright © 1996 by the American Jewish Committee; all rights reserved under International and Pan American Copyright Conventions—Indexed in *Reader's Guide*, *Book Review Digest*, and elsewhere—Available in reference systems produced by University Microfilms International (800) 521-0600 and Information Access Company (800) 227-8431—U.S. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors Inc., 1130 Cleveland Rd., Sandusky, OH 44870. Printed in the U.S.A.

COMMENTARY is a member of The Leadership Network. (212) 725-2106; Fax (212) 779-1928.

The Commentary Publication Committee

Robert L. Pelz, *Chairman*

Stanford M. Adelstein
Norman E. Alexander
Morris H. Bergreen
Maurice S. Binkow
Howard I. Friedman
Stephen Friedman
Roger Hertog
Morton A. Kornreich
Herman J. Obermayer
Robert A. Riesman
Frederick P. Rose
Gordon S. Rosenblum
Gary L. Rosenthal
Michael Saperstein
Michael W. Schwartz
Nanette Scofield
Henry Sherman
Walter P. Stern
Thomas J. Tisch

A Statement of Aims

In sponsoring COMMENTARY, the American Jewish Committee aims to meet the need for a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues. The opinions and views expressed by COMMENTARY's contributors and editors are their own, and do not necessarily express the Committee's viewpoint or position. The sponsorship of COMMENTARY by the Committee is in line with its general program to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern, to fight bigotry and protect human rights, and to promote Jewish cultural interest and creative achievement in America.

American Jewish Committee

Robert S. Rifkind, *President*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary
August 1996

Letters from Readers

Foreign Policy

To the Editor:

Robert Kagan, in "American Power—A Guide for the Perplexed" [April], raises the question as to which principles should guide our foreign policy. His answer is that American preeminence in world affairs must be maintained. To do so, he sanctions the use of force and the spreading of our values. His conclusion stems from pragmatic considerations, begging the question of how to determine where our interests lie.

Let us note that interests are reflective of purpose. It behooves us to state our purpose, and on that basis define our national interests. . . . In my (libertarian) view, the Founding Fathers had it right. The Declaration of Independence championed the unalienable rights of man. Government's role was to preserve them by defending the nation against aggression. Virtue was to be spread spiritually, by example and through ideas, and not at the point of a gun. Consequently, we were to avoid foreign entanglements rather than impose our way of life on other nations. The principles that logically follow are: a never-ceasing spiritual and ideological war against all forms of tyranny, and decisive military action only when America is threatened. Our foreign policy would then be neither realist (unprincipled), moralist (counterproductive), or, as Mr. Kagan wishes, hegemonic (interventionist).

Government ought not to be used to protect spheres of influence, or American hegemony, or anything else that is not necessary for national or civilizational survival. When Mr. Kagan says that the most important objective is to maintain America's preeminence, he is presuming that it is right for America to lead other nations militarily, that doing so would buttress our way of life, and that national survival can be risked for political advantage (of course, if survival and advantage coincide, there is no issue).

In my view, to defend our interests we should separate ourselves from the tyrannies of the world. . . . By this token, we should not be involved in Bosnia (or Somalia or Haiti), for our civilization is not threatened by them and in those places all sides are in the wrong. Nor should we attempt to establish friendly relations with repressive nations, for we do not share their objectives or methods. . . .

Let us spread our way of life by the example of a nation that practices liberty and responsibility, with minimal government intervention. It is not American power that should be (or can remain) preeminent, but American civilization.

Allen Weingarten
Morristown, New Jersey

To The Editor:

The thrust of Robert Kagan's "American Power—A Guide for the Perplexed" is constructive: a reconsideration by the U.S. of its role in the world, in pursuit of a peaceful and just world order. Still, the devil is manifest in some of Mr. Kagan's details.

In the article, Mr. Kagan in part slights Hans J. Morgenthau, one of the founders of the postwar "realist" school of foreign-policy analysis. But Morgenthau stood less for the proposition that morality cannot direct U.S. foreign policy than for the reminder that this concern, *ipso facto*, cannot be dispositive of whether America intervenes in world politics. On this particular count, today's neorealists do not differ, though they bear some hostility to the idea of fostering U.S. ideals abroad. With some justification, they advocate directing U.S. energies, if not necessarily more financial resources, to "home" improvement. Moreover, contrary to Mr. Kagan, who asserts that U.S. military superiority must be maintained, many neoreal-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ists view "superiority" as illusory, supererogatory, and a rationalization for increased expenditure. . . .

Finally, Mr. Kagan contends that President Bush placed Bosnia outside the realm of vital national interests. Not so! The former President merely acceded to the democratic will, however short-sighted and philosophically debatable this position might be. *A fortiori*, that inaction did not necessarily signify that the U.S. had abandoned international responsibility. After all, some responsibilities cannot be incurred unless others are prepared to join in.

ELLIOTT A. COHEN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert Kagan's call for the U.S. to meet its responsibilities as the world's unrivaled power is most welcome, especially in view of the recent radical swings of our so-called foreign policy from internationalism to isolationism. But as a "Guide for the Perplexed," Mr. Kagan's advice is less than Maimonidean. Whereas the great Maimonides . . . sought to meld realistic and idealistic points of view into a workable synthesis, it is Mr. Kagan's wish to have idealism triumph over realism in foreign affairs.

If we have learned anything in the 20th century, it is that a single perspective pursued single-mindedly leads to disaster. But idealism, when pursued in concert with realism, can work miracles. This was the case with the Marshall Plan, whose scope would have been inconceivable without the memory of the Versailles Treaty and its consequences, revisionist historians notwithstanding.

The difficulty for theorists, I think, is that we are accustomed to viewing diplomacy as a single track on which alternating policies must operate either with the moralism of a John Foster Dulles or the doctrinaire realism of a Henry Kissinger. It may be more fruitful to think in terms of two tracks or modes of foreign policy: a *modus operandi* and a *modus vivendi*, the former bearing the policy of realism, the latter the policy of idealism. . . . The *modus operandi* of realism provides the stable basis that frees up the *modus vivendi* of values and ideals. . . .

Given the current less than perfect state of the world, we should take up Kissinger's suggestion that we employ what is at hand. In other words, we need to rehabilitate the notions of hegemonic states and their respective spheres of influence. . . . Today's hegemons are the U.S., Russia, China, Japan, Germany, Great Britain, and France. These should come together to forge a new *modus operandi* for world order. Within such a framework, both realism and idealism can find their respective places. . . .

KEN WHELAN
San Francisco, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Congratulations to COMMENTARY on the great article by Robert Kagan; it opened my mind to many new thoughts. How true it is that our interventions are either wrong or ill-timed. We never learn from history or know how to deal with dictators. I still remember our sanctimonious President declaring "Never again!" at the Holocaust Museum, yet allowing the killing to continue in Bosnia. . . .

I participated in one of our interventions—77 days in Haiti. Was it necessary? Well, after we had destroyed the Haitian economy with our ill-conceived embargo, it seemed the morally correct thing to do. Will we *ever* get it right?

WILLIAM J. LEE
Fort Drum, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert Kagan's argument that U.S. victory in the cold war was due to a unique combination of material power and ideals is sound, and should contribute to a debate on what America should now seek in the world.

Mr. Kagan focuses on our past successes. For the future, he endorses the objective argued by a number of like-minded people, including me (see the Spring 1995 issue of the *Washington Quarterly* and RAND's *Strategic Appraisal 1996*), that the U.S. should seek to consolidate its position as the sole superpower and try to prevent the rise of another global rival.

What is important now is to deal with the challenges and dangers we need to prepare for if we are to be serious about this objective. While we do not now face a global rival, we face a number of lesser dangers, which we must prevent from becoming greater. . . . The dangers are numerous: the future of our alliances is uncertain; China is a wild card; Russia could return to dictatorship or fragment; the Middle East remains a tinderbox despite progress in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict; weapons of mass destruction and missiles are spreading; we are likely to face new forms of warfare as a result of technological and political changes, some of which . . . have the potential to make us catastrophically vulnerable again.

These possibilities imply that we cannot take it for granted that the current favorable conditions will last indefinitely, or even for the next twenty years. The key question is how we can consolidate U.S. global leadership and develop effective strategies for dealing with these challenges. We cannot succeed unless we are able to deal effectively with the following issues:

- How do we maintain alliances among the world's rich democracies and welcome more nations into them?
- How do we preclude hegemony by hostile powers in critical regions such as Asia, Europe, and the Middle East?
- How do we hedge against possible reimperialization by Russia and expansionism by China?
- How do we preserve our military preeminence in a cost-effective manner in the face of proliferation and new forms of warfare?
- How do we avoid overextension?
- How do we maintain our economic prosperity in the face of intensified international competition?
- How do we build public support for U.S. global leadership?

These are the central foreign-policy and national-security questions that Bob Dole and President Clinton must address between now and November.

ZALMAY KHALILZAD
RAND Corporation
Washington, D.C.

ROBERT KAGAN writes:

I appreciate the thoughtful comments of all five writers, each of whom has taken

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a slightly different tack in responding to my article.

Allen Weingarten cogently presents a view of America's proper role which is widely held these days, and not just by libertarians. I doubt, however, that the Founders would have agreed that we should use their foreign policies as a guide to our present conduct. While they declared many principles "self-evident" and were bold enough to create institutions of government which they believed should be maintained by future generations with little alteration, they made no similar effort to impose upon future generations a certain type of foreign policy. The best of them understood that foreign-policy principles would change as the power of the young nation grew. The infant nation which they sought to preserve, after all, was too weak to shape events in Canada, Mexico, or even in the lands beyond the Appalachians, much less play a role beyond the seas.

It would have been foolish, as George Washington declared in his Farewell Address, for the young nation to "implicate [itself] . . . in the ordinary vicissitudes of [European] politics" or to become embroiled in the "ordinary combinations and collisions" of such global giants as France, England, Spain, and Russia. But Alexander Hamilton hoped the United States would some day play the role of a great power equal to that of the Europeans. And Washington, in a much-neglected part of the Farewell Address, declared that if the nation would survive its early tests, "the period [was] not far off" when it would possess the power and the freedom to "choose peace or war, as our interest guided by our justice shall counsel."

Perhaps it is a peculiarly American notion that a nation's approach to the rest of the world can remain the same despite radical changes in its own power and in the international configuration. The realists of Hans J. Morgenthau's era set out to refute this kind of sentimental view, and they performed a valuable service. But I think Elliott A. Cohen does Morgenthau an injustice in summarizing his views on morality in foreign policy. At his most rigorous, Morgenthau was saying more than that morality could not be "dispositive" in determining American policy. After all, who but the most woolly-headed idealist would suggest that it should be?

Morgenthau aimed to fashion a coherent philosophy of foreign policy, and it was the intriguing paradox of his logic that morality could be achieved in international affairs only if nations restrained themselves from pursuing morality in their foreign policies. Much as I criticized Morgenthau in my article, I find his views more enlightened than those of the "neorealists," at least as Mr. Cohen describes them. I do not believe Morgenthau would have agreed that a nation like the United States had to choose between active overseas engagement and "home improvement." Nor can I imagine that Morgenthau would have considered military superiority "supererogatory."

Contrary to Mr. Cohen's insistence, President Bush and his top advisers did indeed consider the war in Bosnia outside the sphere of vital national interests. In his memoirs, former Secretary of State James Baker writes that "unlike in the Persian Gulf, our vital national interests were not at stake. The Yugoslav conflict had the potential to be intractable, but it was nonetheless a regional dispute."

I thank Ken Whelan for his kind comments. But it was precisely the aim of my article to insist that questions of morality and idealism be fully included in the calculation of our national interest. I never suggested that idealism should "triumph."

I also want to express thanks for William J. Lee's kind remarks, especially since

Who is the American Jewish Woman?

What are her interests?
What is she looking for?

The answers to these questions can be found in the ground-breaking study, *Voices for Change: Future Directions for American Jewish Women*. Sponsored by Hadassah in conjunction with the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, this fascinating work represents the research findings of the National Commission on American Jewish Women, and includes as its centerpiece a "Call to Action" that offers a blueprint and vision for a future where women take an active and empowered role in Jewish communal life.

To obtain a free executive summary of Voices for Change or to purchase the complete study for $15, call 212-303-8092 or write to: Hadassah, 50 West 58th Street, New York, New York 10019.

HADASSAH
THE WOMEN'S ZIONIST ORGANIZATION OF AMERICA, INC.

50 WEST 58TH STREET
NEW YORK CITY
NEW YORK
10019

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he appears to have been part of the very successful American mission to shore up democratic government in Haiti.

I am grateful to Zalmay Khalilzad for his very cogent summary of the important issues that need to be addressed by political leaders of both parties. They might begin by reading his excellent *Washington Quarterly* article and the RAND study on which it was based, both of which have influenced my own thinking.

Mr. Khalilzad's list of possible threats that may lie over the horizon is persuasive. I would add only one other: none of the above. We could face threats ten years from now which are literally unimaginable. The history of this century alone has shown just how quickly a world order may collapse and be transformed if the powers or power charged with protecting that order fail in their responsibility.

"Michelin Noir"

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to comment on Barbara Lerner's article, "A Michelin Noir" [May]. I find it marvelous that American scholars not only study what happened in France during World War II, but that they do not hesitate to break taboos. And, what is more, their research is of great value.

For the past 35 years or so, I have been working on related themes (Jews in World War II, the Holocaust, Jewish resistance, the SS and Gestapo in France and in Germany). My latest book (written with Myriam Foss), "*Vie et mort des Juifs sous l'occupation*," was published by Editions Pion in January 1996.

I can only confirm what Miss Lerner says: that most archives of the camps in France (and there were many, as she notes) are officially "closed." I can tell from her article that she is not unfamiliar with the workings of the French bureaucracy in this matter. . . . She must also be aware of the difficulty Claude Laharie encountered in writing his book about the camp at Gurs, which shows how hard it is to gain accesss to the archives of the camps even today. . . .

I myself paid a visit a few years ago to the region of Gurs. That area used to be very poor before 1939, which was one of the reasons for the installation of a concentration camp there: the local population was expected to derive some benefit from it. And I can assure you that this was in fact the case: many a peasant in Gurs, Josbaig, Navarreux, and so on was considerably richer in 1944 than he had been in 1939.

The subject of the camps has always been forbidden territory for most French historians. It was a literary theme, of course, but I do not know of any serious research on the subject. As for the names of its greater and lesser *seigneurs*—well, the laws of libel are quite stringent here. Mentioning any sort of offense that has since been covered by an amnesty is itself an offense. One may not disclose any such fact, much less cite it in evidence. In addition, a large percentage of the personnel of those camps, especially in the middle and the higher ranks, were government officials, many of whom pursued their careers after the war.

The above is just one explanation; it does not purport to be *the* explanation, nor *the* answer to Miss Lerner's question of why the French archives have never been opened.

LUCIEN STEINBERG
Paris, France

TO THE EDITOR:

"A Michelin Noir" contains a number of statements which may convey a misleading impression. . . .

For the sake of historical accuracy, and without going into the detailed statistics which can be found in the masterly study of the subject by Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-45*, let me cite the following comparison between France and Holland in World War II.

The total number of Jews (1941 census) living in Holland under the Nazi occupation just before the start of the deportations was around 140,000. Of these, 110,000 were Dutch and 30,000 foreign. Of this total, 105,000 (i.e., 75 percent) perished in the Holocaust. Therefore, at least 75,000 of those who died must have been Dutch-born Jews.

By contrast, some 350,000 Jews lived in France at the outbreak of the war, 150,000 French and 200,000 foreign. Of that total, 90,000 (i.e., 26 percent) perished—and very few of those were French-born. Moreover, 50 percent of the foreign Jews living in France survived to the end of the war.

It is clear, therefore, that, overall, the French authorities under the Occupation, with all the anti-Semitism and xenophobia which were rife at all levels of French society, had a better record toward the Jews than was the case elsewhere in Europe. They were in fact far better than their Dutch counterparts, contrary to the impression Miss Lerner's article may convey.

M.J. COHEN
London, England

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to add to Barbara Lerner's interesting and sad tale about French concentration camps and anti-Semitism. My mother, sister, an aunt, uncle, and I were on the ship *St. Louis* that was prevented from discharging its 900-plus Jewish refugees in Cuba in May 1939. When the boat eventually was permitted to land in Antwerp, Belgium, my family was transshipped to France.

After the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, my uncle, together with many other adult Jewish males, was picked up by the French police and interned in one of the camps described by Miss Lerner. Because of the terrible unsanitary conditions, superimposed upon very little food, my uncle, who had been perfectly healthy when he entered the camp, contracted tuberculosis and died a short while later. This, despite valiant efforts to get him released by pointing out the absurdity of treating an escapee from Hitler's Germany as an enemy alien. The bottom line was that he (as well as the others) was a Jew.

HANS FISHER
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Some courageous acts did occur among the French during the terrible time of the Occupation. Let me cite one example. After the war, my mother sent contributions to a U.S. organization

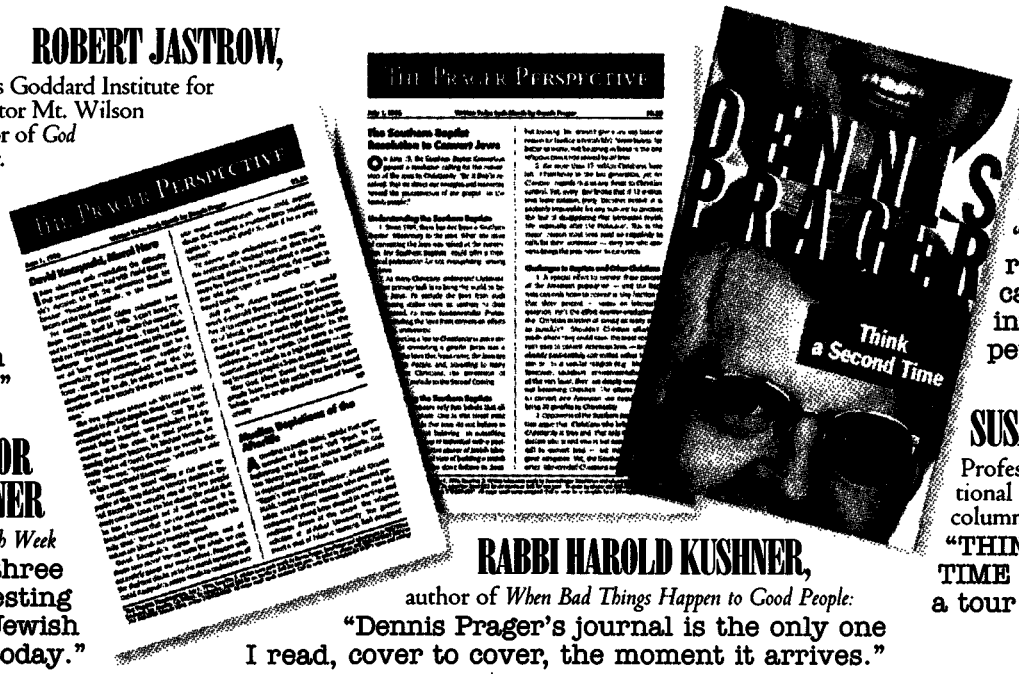
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you don't know Dennis Prager,

one of the respondents in this special issue of *Commentary*, let some people you do know introduce him and his work to you

ROBERT JASTROW,
founder of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, director Mt. Wilson Observatory, author of *God and the Astronomers.*
"Dennis Prager understands more about the human mind than science can tell us."

PROFESSOR JACOB NEUSNER
in *Jewish Week*
"One of the three most interesting minds in Jewish life today."



RABBI HAROLD KUSHNER,
author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People:*
"Dennis Prager's journal is the only one I read, cover to cover, the moment it arrives."

WILLIAM J. BENNETT,
author of *The Book of Virtues:*
"One of those rare books that can change an intelligent person's mind.

SUSAN ESTRICH,
Professor of Constitutional Law U.S.C., columnist, *USA Today*
"THINK A SECOND TIME is brilliant, a tour de force."

DENNIS PRAGER:

- Has been writing his own journal/newsletter for 13 years. After writing the quarterly journal Ultimate Issues for 12 years, he has now begun to write twice a month THE PRAGER PERSPECTIVE.
- Is author of the recently published *Think a Second Time*, 43 essays on 43 subjects, ranging from "Can a Good Man Go to a Striptease Show?" to "Is God Lovable?"
- Testified before Congress on human sexuality and against same-sex marriage.
- Is teaching the Torah verse-by-verse at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. The tapes are heard throughout the world. Elliot Abrams, the new head of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, wrote: "God bless Dennis Prager for doing this, for it is the most exciting piece of Jewish education our family has ever had."
- Has given over 2,000 lectures on five continents. His single most frequently given lecture, "Happiness Is a Serious Problem" is being made into a book.
- Has a daily three-hour talk show on KABC Radio in Los Angeles.
- Has written and produced with David Zucker (*Naked Gun*) three videos on goodness, character, and the real meaning of diversity.
- Is a director of Empower America.

If you do know Dennis Prager, then all you need to know is how to subscribe to his new twice-monthly, THE PRAGER PERSPECTIVE

SPECIAL OFFER TO READERS OF COMMENTARY:

I would like to try The Prager Perspective at no risk.

❑ Please send me, by first-class mail, six months (12 issues) for $24.00, *and* I will receive the tape, "Happiness Is a Serious Problem" free.

❑ Please send me, by first-class mail, one year (24 issues) for $48.00, *and* I will receive the tape, "Happiness Is a Serious Problem" *and* two extra issues free.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Daytime Phone # _____ ❑ Bill me
❑ Credit Card # _____
Exp. Date _____

Mail to: 10573 Pico Boulevard, Suite 167, Los Angeles, CA 90064 or Fax to (310) 558-4241 or call 800-225-8584

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assisting French war orphans. Eventually, she entered into correspondence with a young boy and unofficially adopted him.

His story: he was born in Paris in 1942 of a Jewish family which had emigrated from Poland in the 1920's. When he was an infant of seventeen days, the police came to pick him up along with his mother. But the police found only the mother and grandparents, who had come to see the new baby, so they took all of them. They were never seen again.

Meanwhile, a Catholic French woman who lived upstairs in the same apartment building had hidden the infant and his older brother. The Catholic woman raised the two boys despite the peril to her own safety. . . .

Today that infant, retaining his Polish-Jewish name, is one of France's most eminent ophthalmologists. When I suggested to the son of the good woman who had hidden him that I doubted whether I would have had the strength or courage to do what she had done, he simply stated, "*Mais c'était normal*," it was the only thing to do.

Obviously, the courage of a few French will never obscure the hideous path of cooperation with the exterminators, taken, it now seems, by the nation as a whole. But the story of my adopted "brother" should be shared so that we do not condemn every French man and woman. There were some heroes.

ROBERT A. LOW
New York City

BARBARA LERNER writes:

I am very grateful for Lucien Steinberg's letter. A distinguished French historian whose collections of documents have long been a major resource for all serious scholars in the field, he praises me for breaking the "taboo" against talking openly about the French government's continuing cover-up of its World War II-era concentration camps and much else. But it is he who is brave.

Professional historians generally condemn French government obstructionism in private. Public utterances are usually limited to praise for whatever French official has let the researcher peek at an archival record. But even to get those peeks, a historian usually has to *start* by knowing exactly what he is looking for—often down to the precise French file number of the record or law he is asking to see. Then he has to put up with frequent arbitrary refusals, depending on what a distinguished American historian I know privately calls "the whim of the bureaucrat of the day." Complain, and one risks being denied all access to archival records, even allegedly unclassified ones.

Historians who live in France and are subject to its libel laws, as Lucien Steinberg is, face an even greater risk. As his letter indicates, it is a violation of French law to tell the truth about who did what to whom in France in the late 1930's and the early 40's because most government officials and other Frenchmen who were active then are shielded by French amnesty laws. Many of these people are still alive, still active, or have heirs who are. The laws protecting them are Orwellian; punishment for violating them can be harsh, and truth is no defense.

My situation is different. I am not a professional historian; I do not live in France; and I am content to let others mine official French archives. My sources are unofficial ones—mainly interviews with men and women who survived the French camps, and/or fought in the French Resistance before 1943, the year the Resistance first became popular. So I risk nothing by

A whole new world of listening, with ...

DT-200 TV/AM/FM Stereo Personal Digital Radio by Sangean only $99*

But read this ad for an even better deal!

There is absolutely nothing like it. This outstanding personal receiver fits in your shirt pocket or clips to your belt. It's packed with features that give you crisp reception over the entire AM and FM bands and the audio portions of all VHF TV channels—2 to 13. Here are some of the other great features of this breakthrough personal digital radio.

- *PLL Synthesized Tuning*
- *Built-In Speaker*
- *High-Impact Case*
- *State-of-the-Art Design*
- *Automatic Scanning*
- *Automatic Shut-Off*
- *19 Memory Presets*
- *Headphones and Belt Clip*

The DT-200 works on two AA-batteries (not included). It measures only 2½ x 4 inches and weighs less than five ounces. Fidelity is astonishing! Sangean is one of the two world leaders in the production of advanced radio equipment.

We are one of the selected distributors in the United States of this advanced Sangean receiver and are therefore able to bring it to you at the excellent price of just $99. But we have an even better deal: ***Buy two for just $198, and we'll send you a third one, with our compliments—absolutely FREE!*** Get "shirtpocket" AM/FM reception as you never had before. Catch the audio portion of your favorite TV show, wherever you are; watch the late TV show without disturbing your partner; listen to the commentator when you watch the ball game or any sporting event—and much more. Yes, get a new world of listening pleasure with your *DT-200 Personal Radio by Sangean*. Order it today!

FOR FASTEST SERVICE, ORDER
TOLL FREE (800) 797-7367
24 Hours a Day, 7 Days a Week.

For Customer Service and wholesale/premium quantity orders, please call 415-543-6675.

Please give order **#1041C135**. We need daytime phone # for all orders. Add $4.95 standard shipping/insurance charge (plus sales tax for CA delivery). You have 30-day return and one-year warranty. We do not refund shipping charges.

since 1967
haverhills
185 Berry St., San Francisco, CA 94107

Order by toll-free phone: (800) 797-7367, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

telling the truth. And this allows me to serve as a voice for others who are not as free to speak out about the obstacles they encounter.

I am grateful, too, to Hans Fisher, and to a number of other good people who responded to my article by writing me, describing their experiences in French camps in the 1930's and 40's, or those of others they knew. I find these reports of great value, and I urge every survivor who can to make his experience part of the public record by contributing to the Spielberg project or to any of the other good Holocaust data-collection centers in this country and abroad.

I want to thank Robert Low, too, and to acknowledge again, as I did in my article, his point that there were some French Catholics who took great personal risks to protect Jews and other persecuted "*métèques*" (aliens) in France. Still, as Mr. Low acknowledges, such people were relatively rare in France. Most French men and women chose to ignore their persecuted neighbors and, as Mr. Steinberg confirms in helpful detail, many ordinary French people actively exploited them.

M.J. Cohen's statistics are at least in the right ballpark; his conclusion is not. Jews did have a better chance of survival in France than in Holland; so did Christians. The Dutch had a tougher war and a more brutal occupation. Holland was bombed severely and repeatedly; France was not. Starvation was widespread in Holland, and the death toll among Dutch Christians was high; in France, there were pockets of malnutrition, but no one outside the camps starved to death. And then there is the question of protest. As Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton note and document in their book, *Vichy France and the Jews*, there was almost no risk in protesting against the abuse of Jews and foreigners in France in the early years of the Occupation, but there were no general protests until 1943. In Holland, the risk to protesters was considerable from the start, but the first widespread protest took place on February 25, 1941. The point, in sum, is that to conclude that the French behaved better than the Dutch, or even no differently, one has to blame the Dutch for what the Germans did to them, and exonerate the French for what they did to others.

I cannot close without a word about a distinguished historian whom Mr. Cohen and I both admire, the late Lucy S. Dawidowicz. Mr. Cohen gets his statistics from Appendix A, the country-by-country section of her masterful 1975 book, *The War Against the Jews, 1939-1945*. He seems to regard this as the final word on the subject, but to be true to Mrs. Dawidowicz's spirit, he needs to see her book as a starting place, not an end point. Mrs. Dawidowicz was not a specialist in French history, but, here as elsewhere, she gave us the very best statistics that were available at the time, and many of them were and are still quite good. But some were not, and Mrs. Dawidowicz would have been the last to deny that. Like all first-rate historians, she had an astute eye for gaps and holes in our knowledge, and an insatiable hunger to fill them in.

To honor her memory, we should try to augment the evidence she gave us, not use it to fend off new evidence about any aspect of the Holocaust, least of all in France. My own decade of research in this area convinces me that French statistics are especially slippery. The more I learn, the less confidence I have in many of the conventional estimates of population figures and death rates in wartime France, and the more convinced I become that we will never really understand what happened there until the French archives are fully opened.

Gramercy Park Hotel

Your Private Oasis Just South of Midtown Manhattan

Imagine...You're just minutes away from a trip to Europe!
Whether you're dining on one of Chef Robert's 20 freshly prepared pastas ($12.50 - $19.50) or planning a wedding, (packages begin at just $57 per person), you'll find our hotel to be an oasis of Olde World charm. With Soho, the Village, Madison Square Garden and Off-Broadway theaters in the neighborhood, make it your business to pleasure yourself in style.
Our weekend Brunch ($14.95) is also a longtime favorite.

Singles $135-$140 · Doubles $145 · Suites $180 & Up

21st Street & Lexington Ave.
New York, NY 10010
212-475-4320 • Telex 668755
Fax (212) 505-0535
Out of state call toll-free:
1-800-221-4083

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Business with Israel?
Investing in Israel?
Visit the Israeli
Investor Network
World Wide Web Site
http://www.iin18.com

Write to us for free information and a free issue of:

THE GIZA INVESTMENT LETTER—

ISRAEL'S BEST SOURCE OF NEWS AND ANALYSIS OF ISRAELI SECURITIES

ISRAELI INVESTOR NETWORK, INC.
165 W. PUTNAM AVENUE
GREENWICH, CT. 06830, USA
OR FAX YOUR REQUEST TO: 914-937-7153

COALITION FOR HEALTH CARE CHOICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

There are scores of reasons to support positive reform of managed care systems, *and the Coalition for Health Care Choice and Accountability has compiled over a hundred of them. To order a list of up-to-date "horror stories" (with citations) send $3 to: American Federation of Home Health Agencies, 1320 Fenwick Lane, #100, Silver Spring, MD, 20910. These cases are powerful and will help you in battling the out of control managed care systems in your community. A copy of H.R. 2400, a practical answer to many of the problems of managed care, is included.*

Help us gather these stories. *Clip out any managed care horror stories you read about and send them to Robert Raible at the same address, or fax them to 301-588-4732. We'll include them in our growing list.*

The Deficit

TO THE EDITOR:

In "Is the Republican Revolution Alive?" [March], Irwin M. Stelzer writes:

> The notion that the [budget] deficit automatically places an unfair burden on future generations, thereby stunting the economic opportunities available to "our children and grandchildren," is nonsense.

Mr. Stelzer rightly points out that a distinction must be made between "investments" and other "expenses" before one pronounces the deficit and its resultant debt load to be sinful. The question is whether, along with a pile of IOU's, we are presenting our children and grandchildren with valuable and needed assets—roads and buildings, perhaps, and an environment free from the threat of armed aggression. As Mr. Stelzer also notes, Ronald Reagan ran up the debt, but he also brought about the demise of the Soviet Union, etc.

This makes sense only if one can determine what portion of the debt represents investment. Mr. Stelzer chooses not to do this, and neither can I. I will, however, suggest that while we have been ensuring our country's future through needed defense spending, we have at the same time been lavishing gargantuan amounts of "social" spending upon ourselves—unpaid-for programs that have proved to be of questionable value to the present generation, let alone to those that will come. It is only this squandered portion about which we feel guilty, and it is this guilt that we are trying to pass along as if it were some sort of original sin over which we have no control.

As to "an intellectually respectable argument in favor of a perpetually *un*balanced budget." . . . A number of economists, Keynesian and otherwise, have suggested that if we can sustain a growth rate of 3 to 4 percent annually, we will be in the clear. The problem, of course, is that we have not done so. Growth has hovered around 2 percent or less, and few "intellectually respectable" economists predict much of an increase, if any, in the near term.

Furthermore, although a sustained growth rate of 3 or 4 percent might solve our deficit problems, it would not pay down the debt. This brings us right back to our feeling of guilt (whether Mr. Stelzer shares it or not). If not a clean slate and a level field, what can we nonsensical Americans bequeath to our children and grandchildren, those whom the Founders more aptly called the "millions unborn"?

JOHN P. BRIDGE
Katy, Texas

IRWIN M. STELZER writes:

I agree with John P. Bridge's point that it is difficult to separate investments from expenses when analyzing government outlays. That is why I guard my wallet whenever Robert Reich talks about "investing" in human resources. Nevertheless, the distinction, however difficult to apply in practice, is worth maintaining. At a minimum, it will relieve some of Mr. Bridge's guilt to know that he is bequeathing future generations both a pile of debt and the assets that will help those as yet unborn to pay off that debt: a reduced military burden, a physical infrastructure, and an at least partially educated

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and relatively healthy population.

I must, however, question one point made by Mr. Bridge: that the budget deficit would come down if the economic growth rate accelerated. This assumes that the reason for past deficits has been a revenue deficiency, one that would disappear if growth, and therefore tax receipts, were increased. Not so. Congress has shown itself quite capable of spending more than the IRS can extract from the citizenry, regardless of the level of economic growth and tax receipts. Faster growth would, of course, stimulate a greater flow of money into the Treasury, but it will take some new constraint on the appetite of Congress and the President to see that that money is used for deficit reduction rather than to finance still further expansion of the welfare state.

Containment

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld, in an otherwise unfortunate review of George F. Kennan's *At a Century's Ending* [Books in Review, June], at least recognizes the "considerable accomplishments"—as a diplomat, historian, and writer—of this historic figure.

Nevertheless, the review does Kennan a considerable disservice on two counts: it recklessly accuses him of making pronouncements which are "preposterous" and of "historical revisionism of the most blatant and disreputable sort," but scarcely addresses the substance supporting these allegations.

Concerning the first count, we have Kennan's own words that "perhaps my greatest achievement is that I have created among a great many young people the impression that I am an honest person, that I say what I mean to them." Even Mr. Schoenfeld acknowledges the "adulation" of Kennan among many in the "opinion-making elite," but he fails to understand that such high esteem is the consequence of erudition, eloquence, and integrity.

Regarding the second count, it seems that COMMENTARY has again trotted out another critic to disparage the wisdom of a learned, cautious, and obviously decent man for partisan political purposes. One will not find in Mr. Schoenfeld's review either the essence of Kennan's interpretation of the cold war or the rationale for his critique of America's foreign policy during that period.

Readers of Kennan's book will find him claiming that Stalin and his ruthless cohorts, in the wake of their postwar successes in Eastern Europe, needed to be confronted on the "ideological-political" front (and not necessarily, certainly not primarily, on the military front) in order to prevent a highly destabilized Europe and Japan from succumbing to Communist appeals.

Kennan and other scholars believed that the Soviet threat was not primarily a military one during these early years of the cold war. But by 1949, he writes:

> A great many people in Washington—in the Pentagon, the White House, and even the Department of State—seemed to have come to the conclusion that there was a real danger of the Soviets unleashing, in the fairly near future, what would have been World War III.

Ever militarizing its competition with the Soviets, the U.S. concluded that Japan would not remain demilitarized, then failed to see that North Korea's invasion of South Korea may have been a reaction to this vision of a rearmed Japan. In a panic, America then began to contribute in earnest to the militarization of Soviet-American relations. Kennan notes that the rule of a distinctly more moderate Nikita Khrushchev was severely altered by the U-2 incident, which may even have prolonged the cold war.

Quite important to Kennan's understanding of the cold war is his view that, as Soviet leaders became mere organization men (as distinct from tyrants like Stalin) with substantial domestic problems to address, and as Europe and Japan stabilized, the ideological-political threat subsided. That being the case, what on earth could have justified the obnoxious arms race, except worst-case military scenarios hatched in the minds of experts and opinion-makers who took little notice of the significant changes in the postwar world?

As Kennan wrote in 1984:

> A great many people in the West, here and in Europe, have been persuaded that it is only the American nuclear potential that has restrained the Russians from launching an attack on Western Europe in recent decades. I consider this sheer nonsense. . . .

No doubt what COM-

BATES COLLEGE

COLLEGE CHAPLAIN

Bates College is seeking a full-time College Chaplain.

Candidates for this appointment should be recognized within an established religious tradition and be interested in the particular challenges of working in a secular academic institution. Candidates should have experience in pastoral counseling, be unusually effective in communication skills, and be practiced in encouraging a supportive and inclusive community.

While the teaching interests of the candidates are open, the successful candidate will need academic credentials to hold a lectureship at Bates.

The Office of the Chaplain is organizationally independent, but is significantly connected to the life and the campus community, and reports directly to the President. Salary and fringe benefits are competitive. Candidates should be available to begin the position before January 1, 1997. For detailed announcement and description, please contact the Committee at the address below.

The Search Committee will begin reviewing credentials September 1. Interested persons should send a letter of application, professional résumé, and three letters of recommendation to:

Chaplain Search Committee
Bates College
2 Andrews Road
204 Lane Hall
Lewiston, ME 04240

Bates College values a diverse college community and seeks to assure equal opportunity through a continuing and effective Affirmative Action Program.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MENTARY and Mr. Schoenfeld find most appalling in Kennan's book is his assertion that "the general effect of cold-war extremisms was to delay rather than hasten the great change that overtook [the USSR] at the end of the 1980's." Which is why Mr. Schoenfeld has attempted to besmirch him in this review.

Most egregious, however, is Mr. Schoenfeld's misrepresentation . . . when he asserts that "to our immense good fortune, the cold war came to an end, and on terms that Kennan—at least in his second incarnation—neither wished for nor predicted." Anyone at all familiar with Kennan's writings knows that he very early predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union, provided it was contained. As Fred Halliday has recently noted: "In one sense [Kennan] can be seen as having foreseen better almost than anyone else, not just the end of Communism, but how it would happen." . . .

WALTER C. UHLER
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

How ironic that George F. Kennan, a man who witnessed Stalin's show trials, denounced them for the criminal sham they were, and went on to advise his country on how best to confront the Soviet colossus, should in his twilight years espouse a political system in which an unelected "elite" of elder statesmen would dictate to "both legislative and executive branches of government the things they *must* do, whether they like it or not." Did not Kennan learn anything over the course of his distinguished career? It is truly sad to see a once dynamic and insightful mind slip into delusion and bitterness.

THOMAS D. GORDON
Brooklyn, New York

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD writes:

I agree with Thomas D. Gordon. I also agree, on one point, with Walter C. Uhler (and Fred Halliday)—in fact, I would go them one better. Not only did George F. Kennan—the Kennan, that is, of the late 1940's—foresee better "than anyone else" the end of Communism and how it would come about, he also, by formulating the doctrine of containment, contributed greatly to bringing the Soviet Union down.

Curiously enough, however, in Mr. Uhler's recitation of Kennan's accomplishments, containment—unquestionably Kennan's single most important achievement—gets barely a mention, and certainly not a word of praise. Perhaps this is because *he* is at pains to argue that Kennan believed "the Soviet threat was not primarily" a military one, whereas the military component of Kennan's policy was in fact central. As Kennan put it in his 1947 "X" article, containment was "designed to confront the Russians with unalterable *counterforce* at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world" (emphasis added). Somehow skipping over these unambiguous words, Mr. Uhler never meets my argument that Kennan subsequently abandoned his hawkish position for a dovish one.

But Kennan, as I noted in my review, not only came to disavow containment, by the 1980's he went so far as to claim that he had originally advanced the concept in a fit of lightheartedness. It was preposterous pronouncements like this one which led me to charge him with perpetrating a disreputable form of revisionism.

Mr. Uhler gives himself completely away in attempting to summarize Kennan's interpretation of the cold war. The picture he draws of an inward-looking and misunderstood USSR confronted by a suspicious, bellicose, and militarized United States is almost a mirror-image of historical reality. It does not comport with what Soviet officials like Anatoly Dobrynin are saying as they look back at their deeds. It does not even comport with Kennan's considerably more intelligent, subtle, and historically grounded, if self-contradictory, understanding of the period.

Despite his failings, I admire George Kennan. But with friends like Mr. Uhler attempting to repair his reputation, I also pity him.

Founding Father

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of Richard Brookhiser's *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* [Books in Review, May], Gary Rosen writes:

> Though a firm advocate of freedom of conscience, Washington had difficulty describing an affirmative role for religion in America life. . . . One often detects in him the cold instrumentalism of the Enlightenment, as in the following passage from the Farewell Address: "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them."

Though Brookhiser finds room to praise the "novel ways" in which Washington invoked the Bible and religious belief, a more pointed judgment has been offered by the scholar Harry V. Jaffa: "[T]here is no trace of reverence in Washington's discussion of the need for reverence; the sacred is treated [by him] as a necessity of the profane."

Mr. Rosen has quoted accurately from my chapter on Lincoln's Lyceum speech in *Crisis of the House Divided*. That chapter was written more than 40 years ago. In the intervening time my appreciation of the role of religion, and of Washington, in the Founding, has deepened greatly.

The philosopher Leo Strauss has written that the Weimar republic was weak, because the principles of 1789 were seen to be in opposition to Bismarck, and to the highest German traditions. Hence the emancipation of the Jews was seen to be in opposition to the highest German principles. What Bismarck represented to the German political tradition, George Washington represented to the American. Early in his presidency Washington took the opportunity to write to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island. In his letter, he addresses Jews

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as equal fellow-citizens—equal by right and not by sufferance—for the first time in the history of Western civilization. In the letter Washington seals the American Founding against the tradition of inequality and intolerance that had dominated the history of the Christian West. This was a world-historical moment, not merely for Jews but for the cause of human freedom. For its political astuteness, for its philosophical depth, for its passion, and for its beauty, it should be read in full:

[August] 1790

Gentlemen:

While I received with much satisfaction your address replete with expressions of esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you that I shall always retain grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced on my visit to Newport from all classes of citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security.

If we have the wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and happy people.

The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship.

It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration and fervent wishes for my felicity.

May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.

May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in His own good time and way everlastingly happy.

G. WASHINGTON

The sacredness of the union of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and of the Bible are present here as they are in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural. Today I never read the Farewell Address without remembering that it was Washington's letter to the Newport synagogue that confirmed me as a full citizen of the United States.

HARRY V. JAFFA
Claremont Institute
Claremont, California

GARY ROSEN writes:

Harry V. Jaffa rightly draws our attention to the power and beauty of Washington's Newport letter. It is indeed a stirring endorsement of religious liberty, a cause to which Washington was deeply devoted (as I pointed out in my review). The reverence expressed in the letter, however, is for our natural rights and the government that secures them—worthy objects of reverence, to be sure, but not quite the same thing as our immortal

Rabbi Daniel Lapin

Founding rabbi of Pacific Jewish Center, president of Toward Tradition, radio talk show host on KVI, Seattle. He has written for *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Times*. He has spoken at the Capitol, Family Research Council, Heritage, Christian Coalition and Young Presidents Organization. Rabbi Lapin's unmistakable, entertaining and unique message is now available on tape.

R001	Is America Airborne? Or Have We Run Out of Fuel in Midair? -From affluence to depravity in 30 years. The road back?	$11.95
R002	Is Environmentalism a Religion? -Counter the claims of radical environmentalists.	$11.95
R003	Religion & Politics -Ever wonder how liberalism magically unifies utterly disparate groups?	$11.95
R004	Morality of the Marketplace -A spirited defense of business, capitalism and those who labor in the free market.	$11.95
R005	Making your Passover Seder a Growth Experience	$9.95
R006	Chanukah -- Its Inner Meaning -Chanukah, commerce, rainbows & the zodiac? You wouldn't believe it.	$11.95
R007	From Purim to Passover -- From Paganism to Prosperity -A brilliant panorama of Biblical insights into Nazism & Messianism.	$11.95
R008	Is Pat Buchanan an anti-Semite? -- KVI interview with Rabbi Yehuda Levin	$6.95
D001	Premarital Sex: The 10 Best Reasons NOT To -Not religious arguments. Rational, compelling & persuasive.	$11.95
P001	Partnership Power ™ (Two tapes) -Partners are people who have become convinced that helping you is the best way to help themselves. How to change people into partners.	$19.95
M001	Hollywood vs. America (Two tapes) -Popular culture and the war on traditional values. **-Written and read by Michael Medved**	$16.95

Send order with check to: Or phone for complete catalog.

Cascadia Tapes
P.O. Box 58
Mercer Island, WA 98040
(206) 236-3046

Shipping & Handling free for Commentary Readers.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

souls or our Creator and Lawgiver. I still side, respectfully, with Mr. Jaffa's earlier view.

The Poet Auden

TO THE EDITOR:

Christopher Caldwell's reading of the career of W.H. Auden ["Countercultural Auden," May] seemed to me entirely admirable and convincing, and I could hardly think otherwise, because I make a very similar argument in the manuscript of a book I have just finished on Auden's later years.

Strictly as a point of personal honor, therefore, may I say that I certainly hope I never called "Spain" the "greatest poem of the 1930's," as Mr. Caldwell says I did. I think he may have misread the passage in Richard Davenport-Hines's book where he quotes me as saying that about the sonnet sequence, "In Time of War," whose rhetorical technique and historical vision are entirely different from those of "Spain," and which, as I argued in my book on Auden's early work, was written partly as a refutation and rejection of "Spain."

I am writing this letter because I believe (as evidently Mr. Caldwell does, too) that literary judgments are both moral and aesthetic. I do not mind being accused of mistakes of aesthetic judgment, but if I had in fact ever regarded "Spain" as the greatest poem of the 1930's, I would have made a very bad moral judgment, and it was unsettling to find such a bad judgment attributed to me when I believe I never thought anything of the kind.

Again, that point aside, Mr. Caldwell's reading of Auden's greatness as emerging from "ruthless self-appraisal" corresponds exactly to my own, and I was very glad to see it expressed so eloquently and persuasively.

EDWARD MENDELSON
New York City

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL writes:

My apologies to Edward Mendelson for the misreading, which occurred exactly as he supposed, and my thanks for his kind words, which are particularly gracious under the circumstances.

The Poet Celan

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin's review of my book, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* [Books in Review, June] makes a searching and exact critique, for which I am grateful. He has one remark, though, that may be misleading. Mr. Halkin speaks of "the almost impenetrable decade of the 1960's. . . . Passing over these last years quickly, Felstiner makes little attempt to explicate their poems." But in fact there are ten chapters, more than half the book, devoted to Celan's life and work during the 1960's.

JOHN FELSTINER
Stanford University
Stanford, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Hillel Halkin's fine review of the biography of Paul Celan touched me so much that I have been moved to add a personal note of my own.

Recently a friend brought me a small booklet printed in Bucharest in 1970 (the Ceausescu era). The booklet is titled simply *Versuri—Paul Celan*. It comprises 129 poems (Celan wrote 800 poems), with translations by Peter Solomon and Nina Casian; but there is not one single word about the author, no introduction, no preface, and not one biographical note.

After the war, in 1945, when Paul Celan was twenty-five (I was twenty-six), he came to Bucharest, where he spent two years before leaving for Paris. I

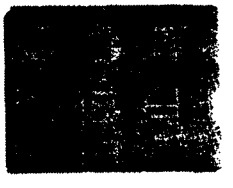
Investor's Business Daily

FREE FOR 2 WEEKS!

Just call the toll-free number listed below and you'll receive 2 weeks (10 issues) of Investor's Business Daily ABSOLUTELY FREE...no obligation. Plus, you'll also receive a FREE audio tape, *100 Ways To Improve Your Investment Results*.

Investor's Business Daily gives you...

- *The New America*
- *News For You*
- *The Economy*
- *Computers & Technology*
- *Leaders & Success*
- *Executive Update*
- *Smart Stock Tables*
- *Expanded Bond Tables*
- *Company Earnings*
- *Stocks In The News*
- *Comprehensive Mutual Fund Coverage*



☎ **800-366-1818**

24 hours a day, 7 days a week!

Investor's Business Daily

12655 Beatrice Street, Los Angeles, CA 90066

Subscribers within the last 4 months not eligible.
This offer is good in the U.S.A. only.

FREE WITH YOUR ORDER!

COMP!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

remember him saying goodbye to his friends at the Bucharest north railway station on a late autumn evening in 1947. Shortly before he left, at an evening of poetry reading, his friend, the poet Peter Solomon (who translated most of his poems), read Celan's great work, *Deathfugue (Tangoul Mortii* in Romanian). During the reading I remember being fascinated by Celan's deep black, sad eyes.

Celan's poetry speaks to me in a very personal and direct way. As a witness to the Nazi occupation of Romania, the Transnistria deportations, and the Romanian *Kristallnacht* (January 21-23, 1941 in Bucharest), I feel the pain of Celan's lines:

> No one
> witnesses for the
> witness.

BARUCH COHEN
Canadian Institute for Jewish Research
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

John Felstiner does devote more of his book than my review implies—although by my count closer to a third of it—to Celan's life and work in the 1960's, and I apologize if I left the wrong impression. And I am glad that I have prompted Baruch Cohen to share his memories with the readers of COMMENTARY.

Sidney Hook

TO THE EDITOR:

Sidney Hook was my closest friend and ally at Stanford for many years until his death. Midge Decter's portrait of him in her review of a volume of his letters edited by Edward S. Shapiro [Books in Review, April] is very close to the man I knew, admired, and loved. Occasionally I also challenged him about his atheism, the way Miss Decter says some of his friends did. For example, I felt close enough to him to quote Camus's remark, "There is something vulgar about the anti-religious attitude." . . .

True, not long after he had suffered a grave illness, he was proclaiming his atheism publicly in a debate with a cowed and feckless rabbi. But at other times, walking with me (shoulder to Jewish shoulder) he seemed to give ground. . . . Shortly before his death, with notable excitement, he spoke to me of his desire to add someone to his line-up of crucial figures in his book, *Heroes in History*: Saint Paul. He also showed me a veritable love letter to him from a Christian leader who, like me, had read through the crusty attitude of skepticism to Something Else.

Who can prove anything here? Do my long years of contact and my intuition about someone who was like a father to me count for nothing? Some may still not be persuaded. It is the others I write for.

ROBERT GREER COHN
Stanford, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I am aware of Sidney Hook's reputation as a "pugnacious," "obdurate," "scornful" man as well as a brilliant thinker and teacher. But my early memory of him belies the more intimidating aspects of Sidney Hook's public persona, and may provide a small example of his richly complex character which Miss Decter laments is missing from the volume of his letters she reviewed.

The political biography and ideological transformation of my grandfather, Sol Feinstone, paralleled those of Sidney Hook. They met in 1930, when Hook was in his late twenties, and remained loyal friends for fifty years until my grandfather's death. Sol Feinstone, a democratic socialist, had been involved for years in the Socialist party until Lenin established the Third International and the American Socialist party split in 1919. Later, he worked with Hook on the Trotsky Defense

How many times have you been asked...
Why date Jews? Why marry Jewish? Why be Jewish?

Who Am I ?

is the outstanding video on the importance of raising children of interfaith marriages in one faith, not in both or as nothing. Teens, couples, parents, grandparents, rabbis, and educators will watch ***Who Am I ?*** again and again. You will laugh, you will cry, and you will be inspired with the importance of raising children with a strong Jewish identity. Non-Jews find the film sensitive and sensible.

Who Am I ? is produced by Lena Romanoff, Director of the *Jewish Converts & Interfaith Network* and author of the book, *Your People, My People, Finding Acceptance and Fulfillment as a Jew by Choice.*

Who Am I? (VHS stereo video) **$79**
Educator's Guide (sold only with video) **$21**
Your People, My People (soft-cover book) **$17**
PA residents add 6% sales tax
Add $3 s/h per item or $7 for all three

Order from:
Identity Plus
1112 Hagy's Ford Road
Narberth, PA 19072
1-800-664-5799
20% discount for video orders received by 10/1/96 with this ad

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Committee in an attempt to expose Stalin's frame-up trials, and through Hook met John Dewey, the Committee's chairman. (When he remarked to Dewey about the intellectual community's apathy and failure to support the investigation, Dewey, who was neither a follower of Trotsky nor a democratic socialist, replied, "Few will listen, but it is most important to have the truth for the record.")

My contact with Sidney Hook was related to my grandfather's pedagogical assumptions. Although I attended school, he believed that a more meaningful education consisted of one like his own. When I was still very young, he expected me to read the books he suggested—Whittaker Chambers's *Witness* and Arthur Koestler's *The Yogi and the Commissar* and *Darkness at Noon*, for example—formulate thoughtful questions, and then listen to him explicate these works. In addition, I was encouraged to observe silently at a respectful distance on the living-room couch, while he and his friends sat across from one another at the great walnut table and carried on impassioned debates accompanied by endless glasses of hot tea.

The hope for me, I suppose, was osmosis; however, at the age of four or five, I understood nothing except the dialogue's gravity. Nor was I ever addressed except in one rare instance when the debate with some famous visitor hit an impasse. Both men turned to me momentarily, simplified the argument, and requested my opinion—when one does not know if a word contains a *shin* or a *sin*, two Hebrew letters that appear identical but can alter a word's meaning drastically, then one should ask a child, they rationalized.

One day in the early 50's when I was about five, Sidney Hook was visiting. Once again, I took my post on the spectator sofa to witness the learned discussion. Suddenly, he turned to me and motioned me to his side. He lifted me onto his lap, interrupting the adult dialogue in order to ask me a couple of softly awkward questions. He continued to hold me in his lap, gently and kindly, a very long time after he and my grandfather had resumed talking politics.

It would be some years before my own "intellectual development" earned me an invitation to sit with guests at the living-room table, and rarely, even then, would I be asked for an opinion. Perhaps that is why such a small gesture on Sidney Hook's part is one that has always made me remember him with deep affection and gratitude.

DEBORAH GOLUB
Sunderland, Massachusetts

Singer and Friend

TO THE EDITOR:

I am not a regular reader of COMMENTARY, but I picked up the May issue because I wanted to read the articles on Israel. I then looked through the rest of the magazine, and came across Terry Teachout's "Mourning Nancy LaMott." It is truly a wonderful piece of writing. I confess I had not heard of Nancy LaMott, but after reading the article . . . , I rushed out to my local record store to buy her CD's.

Everyone hopes for (or, more accurately, fantasizes) a friend who, after one's own death, will be able to convey to others what he or she was "really" like and make even strangers feel that the world has been depleted by one's death. Nancy LaMott was clearly blessed with a talent for friendship, but she was blessed as well by having Mr. Teachout as her friend. I fully believe that the world has been depleted by her dreadfully premature death, and I thank Mr. Teachout for sharing his memories of her.

SANFORD LEVINSON
School of Law
University of Texas
Austin, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

As a lover of cabaret music, I sporadically buy various albums, . . . and I agree with Terry Teachout that most of the artists one hears are undistinguished and disappointing. But when, more or less by chance, I bought one of Nancy LaMott's records, I was enchanted. . . . And then I read Terry Teachout's beautiful piece, and I felt cheated—that is a selfish word but it describes my feelings. Here was a delicate, emotive artist whom I had just discovered and she was gone.

I had not known the circumstances of her death (or of her life) and was deeply saddened and touched, even more so since I am a (now nonpracticing) gastroenterologist who has treated a lot of patients with Crohn's disease. It is a horrible disease—it attacks the young, is devastating and debilitating, and all too refractory to treatment. It takes an extraordinary person to overcome such an illness and succeed. . . .

Mr. Teachout's article does both Nancy LaMott and him proud. It took me a while before I could listen to her albums again, and now I hear a lot more than I did before.

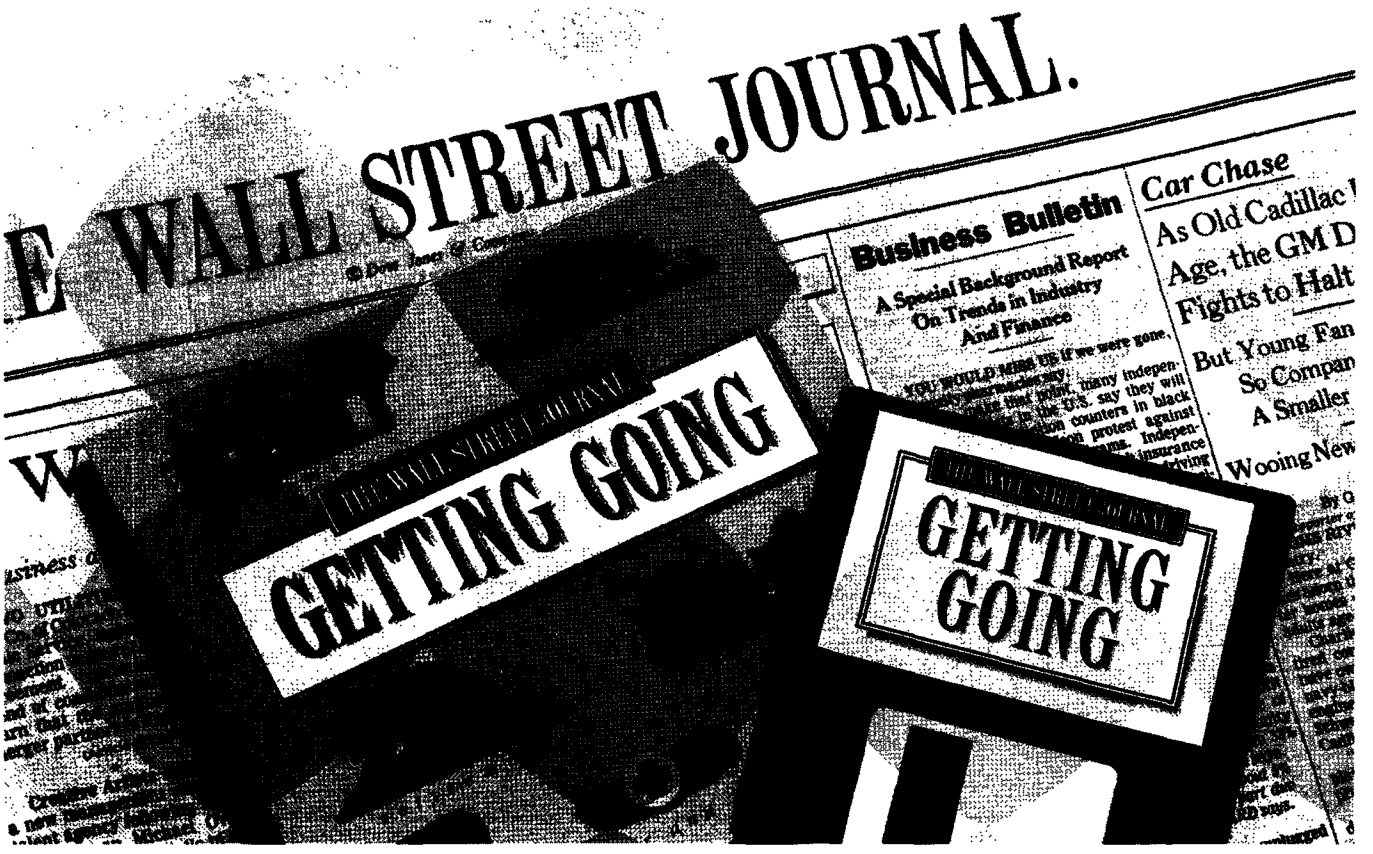
BARTON L. COLBERT, M.D.
Westfield, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

As an occasional listener to WQEW, I first heard Nancy LaMott sing a little more than a year before her death—and I immediately paid attention. She sounded wonderful; she sounded unique; and she grew on you. . . . Then I decided to buy some of her CD's (and I don't do that with any American cabaret singers except Karen Akers). The next thing I knew she was gone. I was shocked. I knew we had lost someone important. Little by little I began to learn her story . . . and then came Terry Teachout's article. The tone was perfect. It made me regret not having met her, as he did, or at least seen her in performance. She comes across as someone you would have liked to have had as a friend. And Mr. Teachout comes across as the kind of friend she deserved—the kind I am sure she had many of. I was moved to tears.

MYLES HERBERT
Port Washington, New York

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Free software
to get your finances going in the right direction.

Keeping your personal finances on track is no easy task. That's why The Wall Street Journal developed a helpful new software program called "Getting Going."

With just a few clicks of your mouse, "Getting Going" will show you the best places to invest your savings ... how big a mortgage you can afford ... or where you should invest your child's college fund.

There's also an investment organizer to help you classify your securities and an analyzer to give you an instant overview of your portfolio.

BEST OF ALL, "GETTING GOING" IS FREE WITH YOUR PAID SUBSCRIPTION TO THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Don't miss this great offer – 13 weeks of The Wall Street Journal for only $48! You get all the business news that has an impact on your career, your family, your life – and the valuable "Getting Going" software to help get your personal finances going in the right direction.

To subscribe, call toll-free 800-322-3414 or mail the coupon today.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
228 East 45th Street, Suite 1515
NEW YORK, NY 10017

Send me: ❑ 13 weeks for $48. ❑ 26 weeks for $86.
Only paid orders accepted.
Send my FREE "Getting Going" software for ❑ Windows ❑ Mac.
(For new paid subscribers only.)
❑ Check enclosed *(payable to The Wall Street Journal).*
Charge to: ❑ AmEx ❑ Diners Club ❑ Discover ❑ MC ❑ Visa

Card No. _____ Expires _____

Signature _____

Name *(please print)* _____

Address _____ Suite/Apt. _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Limited time offer – good in continental U.S. only.
©1996 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
1COME/3UVSW

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary
August 1996

What Do American Jews Believe?

A Symposium

Introduction

WHATEVER ELSE *American Jews may believe in, it is doubtful the majority of them believe in Judaism. That at least is what the surveys suggest, as do the low rates of synagogue membership on the one hand, the high rates of intermarriage on the other. In an effort to gauge the current state of religious opinion among the engaged minority, the editors of* COMMENTARY *turned to prominent rabbis and thinkers across the denominational spectrum.*

The contributions printed here do not represent a complete cross section of Jewish religious thought today. In particular, regrettably excluded by our rules of selection were a number of distinguished figures who are either not Americans or are Americans residing elsewhere (for example in Israel). As for the 47 who appear below, they include heads of rabbinical seminaries; congregational rabbis; officials of the Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist movements; scholars and professors; and independent intellectuals whose diverse perspectives have been avowedly influenced by their religious faith.

To close readers of what follows, a slight statistical bias may seem to prevail in favor of Orthodox or otherwise traditionalist sentiment. If so, it is due mostly to the accident of who responded to our invitation. (In fact the Conservative movement still claims the largest number of synagogue members, followed closely by Reform and then Orthodoxy.) But the distribution also reflects a reality freely proclaimed or conceded by most of the respondents themselves: among affiliated Jews in general, religion is back, and it is fueled by traditionalism. Although hardly the only piece of news to be found in the present collocation, this may well be the most striking, particularly as coming out of an American community routinely characterized as a standard-bearer of secularism in our time.

On this and other matters, including the critical questions of religious authority and religious unity, "What Do American Jews Believe?" is intended not only to clarify contemporary positions but to further a discussion inaugurated in COMMENTARY *exactly thirty years ago this month, in the now-historic symposium, "The State of Jewish Belief." Some but by no means all of the present questions were framed to permit a general comparison with views put forward three decades ago. Four contributors to the August 1966 issue join us again here.*

—ED.

This symposium has been underwritten by THE AVI CHAI FOUNDATION.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Statement and Questions

American Jews and American Judaism have lately come under increasing pressure from a variety of sources, ranging from secularism and movements of personal and sexual liberation to multiculturalism, religious syncretism, and, on the other side, a newly assertive Christian conservatism. To the challenge of contemporary American culture, ever larger numbers of Jews appear to be responding by assimilating, marrying out, or otherwise falling away—although among some there has also been an intense and perhaps surprising movement in the opposite direction, toward a return to religious practice.

In the face of these realities, we would like you to address the following two groups of questions concerning your own personal beliefs and your view of the religious scene:

1. Do you believe in God? Do you believe the Torah to be divine revelation? Do you accept the binding nature of any, some, or all of the commandments?

2. In what sense do you believe the Jews are the chosen people of God? What is the distinctive role of the Jewish people in the world today? Of Jewish messianism?

3. How have, respectively, the Holocaust and the existence of the state of Israel influenced your faith, your religious identity, your observance?

4. In your judgment, which aspects of the contemporary American situation, including the political situation, offer the greatest stimulus to Jewish belief, and which pose the most serious challenge either to Jewish belief or to Jewish continuity?

5. What is your assessment of the current denominational and ideological divisions within American Judaism? To what degree are you worried about Jewish religious unity?

6. Do you see any prospect of a *large*-scale revival of Judaism in America?

David Berger

This symposium explicitly evokes a concrete historical context, but its early questions address realities that are in the deepest sense timeless. The joy and pain of the religious life speak to the profoundest needs and most exalted yearnings of the human spirit. So demanding, so inexorable are these needs that to abandon God is perforce to seek other gods.

I do not speak of a yearning for cheap comfort. One of the many paradoxes of the human condition is that we seek tranquility, yet it makes us restless. The comforts of serious religion come amid the very anguish that it addresses, even creates. God is Provider of consolation and Author of suffering. "Sages," say the talmudic rabbis, "have no rest in this world or in the world to come."

The belief in a commanding God is central to this spiritual *agon* in Judaism. The challenge of observing the commandments without picking and choosing is precisely what makes them commandments, and it is only the belief that they are binding which gives them their power both to restrain and to liberate, to hurt and to heal.

Some years ago, I heard a prominent American sociologist with marginal knowledge of Orthodox Judaism comment with more than a touch of mockery on the supposed spiritual elevation achieved by a refusal to drive on Saturday. I was angered, but I also felt sorry for him. He would never grasp the simple truth in the bumper stick-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er that says, "Hang in there—*Shabbes* is coming," and he would never understand that it is precisely because believing Jews have no choice but to observe the "legalistic minutiae of the law" that they can be freed from quotidian anxieties and pressures for a full day each week. What is it, I wonder, that regulates the rhythms of life for those untouched by this blessing?

The benefits bestowed by Jewish chosenness are, of course, far from unmixed. For millennia, Jews have struggled with the problem of evil without the luxury of dispassionate reflection. The Holocaust is the ultimate embodiment of one of the deep ironies of a chosenness that we cannot relinquish even when we try: a people that has often prided itself on being the bearer of a religion of reason is called upon to exemplify the triumph of faith in the face of the inexplicable.

This task has certainly been made far easier by the historic act of providence that took place with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, though the foundations of Judaism cannot be made to rest even on so sublime an event. As for the Holocaust, a "614th commandment" not to allow Hitler to prevail (a formula proposed by the religious thinker Emil L. Fackenheim) cannot serve as the bedrock of Jewish commitment. Believing Jews maintain their faith despite the Holocaust, not because of it.

Though the chosenness of Israel is a central biblical motif, an overarching theme of the Book of Genesis suggests that the seed of Abraham was selected, as it were, after the fact, following the "failure" of God's original design for humanity. The famous statement in the Mishnah, the rabbinic code of laws, that Adam was created singly so that no one would be able to say, "My father is greater than yours," underscores the universality of the original creation. After the first sin, the Creator did not give up, but eventually He was forced to destroy His handiwork and try again. Once more, a transgression of cosmic proportions compelled a readjustment, and this time Abraham was chosen. Why Abraham? "Because I know him, that he will instruct his children . . . to do what is just and right" (Genesis 18:19). The mission of Israel is an ethical one with a universal dimension.

As an Orthodox Jew, I look at this last sentence with a sense of unease. Not long ago, I saw a flyer at Hebrew Union College announcing a talk on "Judaism and Social Justice." My initial, light-hearted comment was that in this Reform venue, the title was a tautology; my second, more conflicted response, was that in some Orthodox settings it might appear vaguely unkosher, smacking somehow of alien provenance.

Neither reaction is fair, but each caricatures a genuine problem. A significant segment of Reform Jewry has become little more than a vehicle for fashionable social and political trends, and even mainstream Conservative Judaism is no longer anchored by a firm commitment to Jewish law. Orthodox Jews, on the other hand, face the challenge of reinvigorating our commitment to those strands of the tradition which underscore the universal ethic of Judaism. I do not pretend to know quite how this blend of a particularistic commitment to the "sanctity of Israel" and a larger vision of a perfected world works to produce a special impact on humanity as a whole, but the remarkable, disproportionate attention that a tiny people has received throughout its history indicates that somehow God knew what He was doing.

A religious minority in the United States cannot remain unaffected by the standing of religion in the society at large. For us, a host of conflicting forces should ideally be poised in an exquisitely balanced equilibrium. Religion should be very important but not too important; the Bible should be taught in public schools, but with rigorous religious neutrality; religious diversity should be respected and encouraged without succumbing to a relativism of values. The dynamic processes of the real world make such a balance difficult, often impossible.

To pursue one of these examples, the need to preserve church-state separation can be critically important to Jews, but it means that the Bible is barely mentioned in many school systems. Even at the highest levels of our intelligentsia, the central text of Western civilization has become altogether marginalized. The dimensions of this cultural catastrophe were brought home to me when Harold Bloom's *The Book of J*, which repeatedly analyzes phrases in the Bible that are simply not there, went unrecognized for what it was until Robert Alter exposed it in a rather gentle article in COMMENTARY (November 1990). The 15th-century scholar Rabbi Isaac Arama commented that God had seen to the survival of His people by exiling them among nations to whom Judaism mattered. The concern with Judaism as a religion is dwindling, and with it Jewish identity itself.

In a welcoming society, Judaism will be hard-pressed to survive without a distinctive message.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Such a message is to be found primarily within Orthodoxy, whose adherents also retain the greatest sense of connectedness to the Jews in the state of Israel. It is therefore especially regrettable that even with the best will in the world, relations between Orthodoxy and other denominations face grave difficulties. Put simply, Reform Judaism's success, even survival, is dependent upon the infusion of substantial numbers of people who are not Jewish by Orthodox criteria. Orthodoxy's refusal to recognize their Jewishness is a function not of intolerant zealotry but of simple integrity—and those Conservative Jews who extend such recognition compromise the historic principles of their own movement.

For the sake of harmonious interaction with a Jewish denomination encompassing both Jews and Gentiles, Orthodoxy will have to revive the classical category of God-fearing Gentiles and apply it this time to individuals who see themselves as Jews, while the latter will have to cooperate with people who deny their Jewishness. This, I am afraid, is a best-case scenario. One cannot but contemplate it with the most profound concern. I am hopeful, but I am not sanguine.

DAVID BERGER *is professor of history at Brooklyn College and the Graduate School, City University of New York.*

Saul J. Berman

I FIND BELIEF in God to be simple; my real struggle is to achieve knowledge of the existence of God. Maimonides, in the first positive commandment in his *Book of the Commandments*, leaves uncertain whether the prime *mitzvah*, or commandment, is belief in or knowledge of His existence. I think that the real challenge of religion is to gain knowledge of God and Her will for each of us, through revelation, reason, and experience.

The more I study the Torah the more I am convinced that it is the revealed word of God. The more I study ancient cultures, the more I see the absolutely radical disparity between the values of pagan civilizations and the values which Torah brought into the world. Torah was God's weapon in the war against idolatrous culture; and war it was.

I believe that the Torah is the expression of God's wisdom for the Jewish people, and ultimately for all of humanity. Therefore, every *mitzvah* of the Torah is the bearer of meaning and of potential for perfection. The distinctive values of Torah are taught through laws directly governing the relationships among individuals. Those same values are also taught through their ritual enactment which serves as symbolic communication, shared by the community and available for transmission to the next generation.

We are in some measure the victims of our own success. Partly through our own efforts and partly through the achievements of Christianity and Islam, the dominant elements of the Jewish world view have become commonly accepted, at least in principle if not in practice, by Western society. So much so, that, tragically, the average Jew would probably not be able to assert with any confidence the existence of a distinctive Jewish ethic.

The Torah, the prophets, and the rabbis all taught that God's election of the Jewish people invested us with a special mission—to utilize the Torah as a tool to transform ourselves, both individually and nationally, into models, inviting emulation by the rest of humanity. Our duty is, both directly and indirectly, to promulgate the spiritual grandeur, the social holiness, and the ethical integrity of life rooted in God's Torah.

If we look realistically at the world, is there any doubt that there is much we still have to teach about the implementation of Torah's values in the general society? Indeed, there is a vast untapped reservoir of Torah's ethical and spiritual teachings waiting to be unfolded. We have yet to promote the duty to rescue, and the criminality of the failure to rescue; the duty of sensitivity to the emotions of others in the context of commercial relationships; and the potential for spirituality and holiness in the deepest parts of the creative and productive processes.

I struggle sporadically, but intensely, with the integration of the Holocaust into my religious *Weltanschauung*. I have no answers, only observations. How rapidly hatred can descend into dehumanization and allow treatment of the "other" as an object—with total inhumanity. How easily good and decent people can be denuded of their values; how thin is the patina of Christian civilization. Sophisticated and educated Jewish leaders, religious and secular, had no greater insight

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into the historical forces sweeping them up than did the simplest Jewish laborer. And in the aftermath, Christian society has still not learned the Jewish concept and practice of *teshuvah*, "return."

While I remain unresolved on the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust in Jewish history, I see clearly the challenge and opportunity placed before those of us who have merited being alive at the birth and infancy of the Third Jewish Commonwealth. I am deeply a Diaspora Jew. I do not believe that I am bound by *halakhah*, Jewish religious law, to live in Israel, and I am cognizant of the fact that we are all the heirs to a rabbinic Judaism which developed primarily in the Diaspora over the last 1,800 years.

Nevertheless, I am profoundly distressed by the realization that those of us who choose now to remain in "exile" will be denying ourselves the opportunity to participate in the great new challenge confronting the Jewish people—to create a more perfect state, a more ethical society, expressive of the deepest values of Jewish law and thought. We are denying ourselves a voice in the formative stages of a process that will shape the next 2,000 years of Jewish history.

Three factors have powerfully undermined Jewish particularity in America: the open society, the value of material pleasure, and Jewish ignorance. The first two are not likely to change, and, therefore, the threat to Jewish continuity for the majority will not abate. The third factor, Jewish ignorance, is subject to some amelioration, and, therefore, there is some hope of retaining at least some portion of our people.

The approach to Jewish survival through Jewish education is not simple. Jewish education consists of the transmission of data, of skills in the acquisition and analysis of those data, and of the spiritual beliefs and values which make the prior two worth pursuing and achieving. My experience is that even in the modern Orthodox community, there is a serious dearth of teachers who can convey the spiritual significance of Jewish knowledge to adolescents. That is why the year in Israel after high school has become such a vital element in the educational process for our children. There, they discover the wholeness of faith within an Orthodox life lived in the real world, and all the data and skills which they had previously acquired take on real urgency and value.

The broader Jewish community has also discovered the power of a trip to Israel, even severed from a foundation in Jewish data and skills. But I do not believe that its impact will be deep and lasting without them. Likewise, the community has discovered the power in the transmission of Jewish data and skills, and is taking seriously the need for a vast network of Jewish day schools. But if the teachers in those schools fail to provide even a sustaining level of Jewish spiritual belief, the effect will, I believe, remain very shallow and we will not see the hoped-for contribution to stemming the tide of intermarriage and assimilation.

The Reform movement has been engaged in a lengthy experiment in historical reversion. Returning, as it were, to the end of the prophetic period, Reform Jews ask what Judaism would have looked like had it not turned to law as its primary means of religious expression. They have created an alternative which, with the adoption of the belief that Jewish identity can be determined by patrilineal descent (more accurately, by toying with nonlineality), has now given up the ghost of normativeness. I see the Conservative movement as riven between those who would join Reform in its antinomianism, in practice if not in theory, and those who insist that the reversion of the Conservative movement be only to the end of the talmudic period (*ca.* 500 C.E.), thereby accepting talmudic law but reserving the right to modify or reinterpret any post-talmudic accretions.

The divisions within Orthodoxy are absolutely minor, albeit ideologically fascinating, as compared with the huge divide between the normative and non-normative versions of Judaism currently in the marketplace of ideas. Does Judaism command, or only desire; does it create a community with common duties or only one with common voluntary practices? Almost everything else is a matter of social convenience or institutional competition or disagreement about whose rabbi is more charismatic or more tolerant of the latest deviance.

Jewish religious unity has gone the way of the dodo bird. The question now is whether Jewish peoplehood will be able to survive the next round of the "Who is a Jew?" controversy. Will the pluralism of Diaspora Jewry be able to tolerate and encompass even the non-pluralism of Israeli Jewry? I suspect that sooner rather than later the answer will be no, with deleterious consequences for both communities.

Having previously omitted my response to the question about Jewish messianism, I can now confidently indicate that messianic arrival is the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most likely circumstance for a really large-scale revival of Judaism in America. Now for other, less likely, scenarios: a severe economic depression could cause a resurgence of anti-Semitism and the emergence of a powerful movement of Christian fundamentalist proselytization, which could promote both emigration to Israel and Jewish particularism; or, MTV might undergo a spiritual awakening and replace the Material Girl with videos of the Orthodox singers Mordecai ben David and Avraham Fried. Well, I guess I'll put my money on messianic arrival.

SAUL J. BERMAN, *an Orthodox rabbi, is associate professor of Jewish studies at Stern College and adjunct professor of Jewish law at Columbia University law school.*

David R. Blumenthal

I TRUST IN God because God is a living presence in my life. I experience God in prayer—in joy, in fear, in power, and in admitting and asking for my own innermost needs. I feel God's presence as deeply personal. I am embraced, judged, and listened to by God. The liturgy helps; I use it even when I am not "inspired." There are stretches of time which are wilderness, silence, being separated from God's presence. But always I come back, I return to God.

I also experience God in nature. Suddenly I see the creative power beyond what I perceive—in different seasons, when walking, when driving. I recite the blessing over natural phenomena, or I just thank God often during the year.

I also feel God's presence in moments of human contact—with students, with friends, frequently with family, sometimes even with strangers. Much of human contact is routine, some of it is abrasive. But I have become accustomed to stopping myself and looking at the other—in wonder—and that returns me to God.

I sense God, too, when studying and teaching sacred texts. The personal and transpersonal presence of God, in all its forms and varieties, springs out at me from the pages. Religious texts are religious because they embody the presence of God; the rest is art, literature.

For me, God is "He." That is the way I experience this presence. This "He" often acts like a "She," if such characterizations can be stereotyped—compassionate, loving, comforting, embracing—but I feel God as He. When I talk about humans, I always use inclusive language. In writing about God, I also use inclusive language so as to include women. But when I talk to God in prayer, I use male-gendered language. It is fuller, more complete, more powerful—for me. Others sense and worship God impersonally, using abstract language and metaphors of detachment. Still others sense and worship God as She, utilizing female-gendered or mixed-gendered language. Those of other religions experience and worship God in all the different modes of human understanding and expression. There is no right and wrong way to experience, talk about, and address God. I understand, and support, my fellow worshipers.

I also sense God in history. Every trip to Israel, especially to Jerusalem and the Western Wall, brings God's presence to me. On *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Israel's independence day) and *Yom Yerushalayim* (commemorating the liberation of Jerusalem in June 1967) I will not, as a matter of principle, pray in a synagogue which does not recite Hallel, the festival psalms of praise. I also do not like to pray in synagogues that do not routinely recite the prayers for the state of Israel and for the Israel Defense Force. I try to attend community commemorations of Israel's independence and its war dead, and I include the state of Israel and its defense forces in the grace after meals. I am embarrassed that I do not own property in the land given us by God and revitalized by the Jewish people.

The Holocaust was a terrible problem for me, which is why I wrote *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (1993). In it, I studied some texts, explored the domain of psychotherapy with adult survivors of child abuse, reached some very unpleasant but true conclusions, and made some suggestions for confronting God in prayer on the subject of the Holocaust. I use this liturgy twice a week and on Yom Kippur. It is frightening to confront God, in thought and in prayer, but, since truth and mercy are essential to our relationship, I say the words of anger and protest. This has brought me closer to God; it has strengthened my faith.

The rest is commentary. The Torah is God's communication to us. It is the structure of God's relationship to us, and ours to God; that is the meaning of covenant. I accept the view that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teaches that God's presence appeared powerfully on Sinai to all who were there, but that that appearance was given form by Moses and interpreted by subsequent authorities. Some commandments, *mitzvot*, are more binding than others. The tradition has always known this, though it sometimes teaches that all *mitzvot* are alike in value.

God chose the Jewish people for this revelation, though God has made the divine presence known to others and is in covenant with all humanity, as the tradition teaches. This chosenness is for closeness and intimacy; it is not a license for superiority or inferiority. It does, however, excite jealousy; there is not much remedy for that, except understanding and humility.

I accept, too, the teaching that says that God's presence gives meaning to our personal and collective lives and that, in the end, humanity will live in a better world. We need to work toward that world, but we cannot bring it about by ourselves. God will have to act to bring the messiah who, in turn, will inaugurate this better time in ways we scarcely comprehend.

The most serious challenge to Jewish belief, secular and religious, is the shadow of the Holocaust. The question of how God allowed it to happen leads to a denial of God's participation in our national life. For some, this is conscious; for others, it is just below the surface. But it is there in the attitude of resolute self-help, in the widespread secularism and assimilation, in the determined preoccupation with Torah, *mitzvot*, proper belief, and religious politics, and in the conspiracy of silence that surrounds the very question.

The Holocaust, as it projects its shadow toward the future, also obliges us to a hyper-vigilance which often distorts our political and social perspectives in areas as varied as the security of the state of Israel, the need for peace in the Middle East, the depth of the threat of anti-Semitism, and the need to participate in, or be separate from, the non-Jewish world. I do not see any great stimulus to renewal of the presence of God in our personal and national lives, though there are efforts by small groups here and there. Nor do I expect a large-scale revival of a God-centered Judaism anywhere.

Jewish unity, religious or otherwise, is a fiction belied by reality and Jewish humor. What is at stake is the ability to form coalitions to achieve carefully considered common goals. In matters of security and peace, despite the 1996 elections in Israel, there will be a great deal of consensus. In matters of culture and identity, there will not be much agreement. Coalitions in these areas will be difficult to form.

Modernity comprises both an impulse to an increased demand for recognition of individual and group rights and a thrust toward authority and centralized control of belief and praxis. The tension between these two components will put stress on all forms of Jewish identity, as it does on non-Jewish identity. Further, the increasing level of communication will create a "crowding" effect in modern life, which will also increase the tensions of identity- and community-formation. These processes are not specifically Jewish and need to be addressed by modern society in general.

DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL *is the Jay and Leslie Cohen professor of Judaic studies at Emory University.*

Marshall J. Breger

THE CENTRAL divide in Judaism, as a religion based on law, is between those who accept the normative authority (literally the "yoke") of the law (*halakhah*) and those who view Jewish law as some kind of historical archive for spiritual inspiration. To that extent Orthodoxy and some part of the Conservative movement fall on one side of the divide and Reform and a larger part of the Conservative movement on the other. That is, or at least should be, the defining normative dispute in Judaism. The many institutional distinctions among the various formal divisions—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist—pale by comparison.

As one who does accept this "yoke," I focus more on what the law requires than on the ups and downs of my personal relationship with God, although I do not doubt His presence either in history or in our lives. But one cannot treat the law as a good in itself. And in that regard, Orthodoxy, I fear, often fails to understand that observance of the law's letter without understanding its spirit is not enough. *Hiddur mitzvah*, the goal of making a *mitzvah* "beautiful," is less a matter of aesthetics or of money than of spirit. An entire strain of 19th-century yeshiva educa-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion devoted itself to the teaching of *mussar*—ethical behavior—and admonished its adherents to do better in their treatment of their fellow man.

In that regard, it pains me that in some Jewish circles the reaction against political liberalism and universalism has been so fierce that a species of selfishness—a focus on Jewish particularity—has become a virtue. At the far end of the continuum we find the now-infamous assertion of Rabbi Ginsburgh of Kiryat Arba (in Israel) that Jewish blood is more valuable in God's eyes than the blood of Gentiles. Judaism, however, requires us to reject even the more "reasonable" articulation of this strain of Jewish particularity: that we concentrate on Jewish suffering to the exclusion of that of the Gentiles. We cannot, we must not, give up on our responsibility for *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world, for through that effort will the messiah come. Indeed, that responsibility is a *halakhic* responsibility—i.e., part of our own religious particularity.

In the next century, Jewish religious life in America will, I believe, tend toward two poles—a robust confident Orthodoxy (still a minority) concerned with *halakhah* and a spiritually energized Reform. Conservative Judaism, once seen as the authentically American Judaism, will find itself increasingly under pressure.

As an observant Jew I cannot but understand the creation of the state of Israel as "the dawn of our redemption." Yet, and I say this with some degree of sadness, I suspect that American Judaism in the next century will be less focused on Israel. The miracle is no longer considered a miracle by most American Jews. Part of this is due to the very success of Israel in becoming a normalized state—a nation like other nations. In the period of the British Mandate over Palestine a group of poets shed their Judaism to call themselves Canaanites—their goal was to draw deep upon the values of the historical inhabitants rather than of Diaspora Judaism. The Canaanites were spurned by the Yishuv, the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine, not because they were avant-garde but because they tried not to be Jewish. In those less sophisticated times you could not be a Palestinian Jew without being, in some sense, Jewish as well.

But today's Israelis are worldly-wise. In the post-Zionist demimonde of North Tel Aviv and Savyon, the goal is to drink deep from Western materialism, not from Judaism. Thus I see an Israel that is less Jewish and an American Jewry that in return maintains on occasion a discreet distance from what for the last 50 years has been the center of Jewish existence.

The distance will be increased by the likely inability of the Orthodox establishment in Israel to accept religious pluralism in Israel. The greater the pressure for religious conformity there, the less engaged non-Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora will be with the Jewish state. Only the existential threats to Israel's existence have kept this incipient crisis at bay.

In its central feature, Jewish law differs dramatically from the perspective of modern secularism and modern liberalism. The intellectual thought of the 20th century is focused on the celebration (indeed the glorification) of the individual; all is subsumed by the goal of personal liberation. The view of Judaism is markedly different. In rabbinic Judaism there is rarely any reference to rights; the operative terms are duty and responsibility. (It is less that one has a right to an unobstructed view from a window in his building; rather, his neighbors have the responsibility not to restrict his view.) Nor is there much focus on feelings—one's duty is to practice the commandments. This focus on both duty and responsibility puts Judaism inextricably at odds with almost all species of modernism and political liberalism.

The irony is obvious. Jews have been the spear-carriers of modernism in both culture and politics; they are more likely to be counted among the "worldly-wise" than almost any other religious group. Most American Jews, I hazard to say, would not even recognize the language of faith. For them, Judaism is at best a culture, at worst a form of nostalgia: it is not a spiritual faith. For American Judaism as a religion to prosper in the next century it must transform the culture of American Jews—no easy task.

Since the coming of emancipation in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Jewish community has had to struggle daily with the corrosive effects of modernity and assimilation. Nonetheless, we have muddled through. A little more than a century ago, Rabbi Maurice Harris of Chicago pointed out that "our distinctive characteristics are going, one by one: we are becoming more and more like our neighbors and less distinguished from them. . . . This is the age of freedom," he declaimed, "are we Jews ready for it? Are we brave enough to walk alone? Can we trust ourselves?"

We are still here and still asking the same

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

question. Perhaps that is what it means to be a "chosen people."

MARSHALL J. BREGER *is visiting professor of law at the Columbus law school, Catholic University of America. From 1983 to 1985 he was a special assistant to President Reagan, serving as liaison to the Jewish community.*

Nina Beth Cardin

BELIEF IN God motivates all that I do. Not that I do not wonder about the existence of God—I do. And not that I do not puzzle over the nature of God—I do that, too. But in truth, on a daily basis these wonders and doubts do not overly occupy my mind, for I have resigned myself to living outside the Garden, to being a true daughter of Eve, to bearing—and promoting—the blessed curse of desiring, pursuing, yet being unable to possess divine knowledge.

Still, I need and thrive on my belief in God. I believe in this belief because it is this belief in God, even more than the existence of God, that motivates me, that makes a claim on me. This is not blasphemy. Judaism itself realizes that "all is in the hands of God except the fear of God." It is not the existence of God alone that animates the world, but our response to that belief.

My belief in God pulls me into relationship: it gives me a deep, rich memory that I share with others; a path to travel staked out by those who came before, with enough room for many to walk together; and a compass to help me go where we have not been before. It does not afford me the wisdom to make a brief for God. I am no more able than you to answer in the name of God those who lie in their beds, sick with disease, and wonder why this is happening to them. But I am able, indeed commanded, to sit by their beds, to tell them stories of others who sat by the beds of others who were sick, to offer them comfort.

All this springs from "Torah"—the narrative, law, wisdom, and ways of the Jewish people. Torah is the Jewish people's response, or midrash, to our experience of God. Since the Torah's genesis is divine, Torah too is divine. Since the encounter between God and us is continuing, so Torah is continuing. That does not mean, however, a leveling of all "Torah." The source, the original, the Five Books of Moses and the Prophets and Writings that follow, stand unique and inviolable, even the parts that trouble us. They are the foundation and so they must remain.

In response to the above, I do *mitzvot*. That is, I assume that I will observe a *mitzvah* unless and until a compelling reason argues against it. I do not assume that I will *not* observe a *mitzvah* until it proves itself compelling to me. To do the latter is to privilege American secular society over Judaism; to do the former is to privilege Jewish culture over American society.

I believe that God chooses the Jewish people in the same way that a loving parent chooses a child: every child is endowed with unique qualities that he or she alone can bring to the world. A loving parent will choose to encourage the child in accordance with the child's abilities. This is both good for the child and good for the world. Jews have the unique gifts of Torah, of the prophets, of our rich textual, legal, liturgical, ritual, and spiritual traditions. We have the gift of believing that we are partners with God in this world; we have the gift of endless (if sometimes shaky) hope; we have the gift of community. We have a vision of a world without need, without strife, of a world that is all Sabbath. We have a map that guides our path toward this vision, with station stops along the way (*mitzvot* and holidays) that nourish us so that we do not give up.

I never knew a time absent the Holocaust. I never knew a time without Israel. I learned about them as I learned about the *aleph-bet*, the stories of creation, what the Sabbath means, how to say the blessing over wine. You might as well ask how Passover has shaped my religious identity, or the Sabbath influenced my faith. As the Holocaust and Israel are increasingly woven into the full cloth of Judaism, it is harder to tease these strands apart. They have not so much affected me as become a part of me.

If these strands are not separate, neither are they complete. What we experience is just the first creation. What we make of these experiences, the way we speak of them and remember them, is the second. We must make of our reactions a creation. That is a humbling and holy task.

Which aspects of America offer the greatest stimulus to Jewish belief? Freedom, science, knowledge, democracy, equality, prosperity, mo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bility, technology. Which pose the most serious challenges? Freedom, science, knowledge, democracy, equality, prosperity, mobility, technology.

I fear for Jewish unity. I fear for it when I hear that good, committed, educated, liberal Jews say they would rather forgo a day-school education for their children than send them to an Orthodox day school because of its nonegalitarian beliefs. I fear for it when I hear that material which includes my name accompanied by my title cannot or will not be distributed in certain places and by certain groups. I fear for our unity when I see that acknowledgment of the legitimacy of any form of non-Orthodox Judaism in Israel is threatened. I fear for it when I hear the growing hostility on both sides and the diminishing desire or hope for unity. I fear for it when in almost every major Jewish community there are two rabbinical organizations, one for the Orthodox rabbis and one for all the others. And despite a few oases of cross-denominational association, which we dare not mention for fear that exposure will jeopardize their continued association, I fear that the gap is widening.

There are pockets of hope, however. Perhaps one most strongly felt is in the single arena that is the eternal leveler: sickness and dying. ***Bikkur holim*** groups, which visit the sick in hospitals; hospital and community chaplains; the growing number of hospice chaplains—many of these conduct their work in a pan-denominational way. We should accept this teaching from the ill and the dying, and respond.

As Jews, we always see prospects. Truly we are witnessing a revival in Judaism. Some have suggested that there are more Jews studying Torah in the world today than there were in all of the academies and all the yeshivas in the course of Jewish history combined. Certainly, American Jews contribute mightily to these numbers. As the wave of spiritual renewal rises throughout the world today, the spiritual quest within Judaism will rise with it. Our task is to be diligent without being over-anxious. Perhaps we were always meant to be a small group. And the real question is not just revival, but revival for what?

NINA BETH CARDIN *is editor of* Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Responsibility *and associate director of the National Center for Jewish Healing.*

David G. Dalin

I BELIEVE IN a personal God Who listens to our prayers, whether or not He answers them to our satisfaction. I believe divine revelation to be a fundamental principle of Judaism, which I unapologetically affirm. Revelation, as I understand it, is the traditional belief that God has directly communicated with human beings, revealing to them truths about the world and its nature. I accept as a matter of religious faith the biblical claim that God communicated with Moses directly at Sinai, and in so doing made His divine will and commandments known in the wilderness.

While I believe that revelation is a central principle of Judaism, I differ from the Orthodox position in that I do not believe that revelation was confined to Sinai or to the biblical period alone. I find it difficult to accept the notion that God's revelation has been restricted to one time or place, or to one historical epoch. Rather, it has been a continuous process, reflected in the teachings of the prophets and the rabbis of the Mishnah, as well as in the thought and writings of a variety of Jewish thinkers and exegetes, medieval and modern, who have shaped Jewish religious thought and rabbinic interpretation throughout the centuries, including our own.

I accept the binding nature of many, but not all, of the commandments, or ***mitzvot***. I have always found especially compelling Abraham Joshua Heschel's insight that "Judaism is based on a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation." Divine revelation since Sinai, I believe, continues (in part) in the form of new interpretations of the Torah, and reevaluations of the ***mitzvot*** contained therein by the rabbis of each generation. Not all of the commandments have been binding for all people, in all lands, at all periods of Jewish history. Thus, for example, many of the 613 commandments were applicable only in the land of Israel or in the time of the Temple. In this belief, of course, I am not alone: Jewish exegetes since Saadia Gaon in the 10th century have distinguished among the commandments, suggesting that some may be more binding than others. Inevitably, in each generation, religious Jews have done (and will continue to do) likewise.

Since the dawn of modernity, much thought and debate have been devoted to defending or rejecting the doctrine of Israel's election. I con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fess that I have never been able to sustain much empathy for the arguments against chosenness that have been so central to much of liberal Jewish religious thought (and polemics) from Spinoza to, in this century, Mordecai M. Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism. An affirmation of the idea of chosenness—of Israel's election by God—is a central tenet of my religious faith as a Jew. Over the years, I have always considered (and continue to regard) the Hebrew blessing thanking God "Who has chosen us from all peoples by giving us His Torah" a profoundly important and meaningful part of our traditional Jewish liturgy, and one that should never be deleted from the worship service. For 20th-century Jews, the wonder of Jewish history itself—the historic miracle of continuity and survival—should justify a continuing belief in the chosenness of the Jewish people.

The Holocaust has played less of a role in shaping my religious faith and identity than has the state of Israel. Indeed, in terms of my own personal religious evolution, Jerusalem has been a source of more compelling symbolism and spiritual meaning than has Auschwitz. Against all odds, the Jewish people did survive the Holocaust and our generation has been privileged to witness the long-promised "ingathering of the exiles." As the religious philosopher Eliezer Berkovitz has reminded us, the Holocaust was not all of Jewish history, nor was it the final chapter.

The existence of Israel has profoundly influenced my faith, identity, and observance. In recent years, observance of the new Jewish holiday of *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, Israel's independence day, has become of heightened religious significance for me. So, too, has the fact that for centuries, in their daily prayers, religious Jews reaffirmed their abiding belief in an eventual return to Zion, confident that one day this belief would be translated into historical reality. As their spiritual heir, I share their faith and their confidence in God's continuing presence in Jewish history, and His transcendent commitment to the Jewish people's survival.

One serious challenge to the free exercise of Jewish belief in America has been posed by the triumph of the legal doctrine of strict separationism that has dominated church-state thought and jurisprudence, both in America generally and within the Jewish community. I do not share the belief espoused by most liberal Jews that religious freedom is most secure where religion and state are strictly separated. On the contrary: I remain convinced that a political climate uninformed by religious beliefs and values undermines the position of religiously observant Jews, and of other communities of faith, within American society. Indeed, the triumph of strict separationism as a legal doctrine, with its promise to expunge all religious belief and symbols from the public arena, may actually infringe upon the free exercise of religion so cherished by American Jews. Thus, in their own self-interest, I believe American Jews should seek and applaud judicial decisions that permit far more, rather than less, accommodation of religion, and that would make it easier for observant Jews to uphold the tenets and practices of their faith.

Today more than ever, I am deeply worried by some of the interdenominational confrontations and disagreements that threaten the religious unity of American Jewry. Thus, for example, the refusal of a growing number of Orthodox rabbis to participate in Jewish communal organizations or forums which include non-Orthodox rabbis, or to recognize the legitimacy of non-Orthodox conversions, or of non-Orthodox Judaism itself, has contributed to an atmosphere of discord and antagonism. So too with the understandably acrimonious debate over the question of Jewish religious identity: in its unprecedented abandonment of the matrilineal principle in 1983, the Reform movement broke with centuries of rabbinic law and tradition, which held that only children born of a Jewish mother were to be considered Jews. Reform and Reconstructionist support for patrilineal descent, being radically incompatible with traditional Orthodox and Conservative definitions of "who is a Jew," threatens the religious unity of the American Jewish community as never before.

Still, despite my fears about the state of Jewish pluralism, I see at least some evidence to suggest the prospect of an authentic, and potentially large-scale, Jewish revival in America. Over the past decade and more we have witnessed the dramatic growth of the *baal teshuvah* movement of returnees to Judaism, which has revitalized all segments of the community. In recent years, the intensification of Jewish religious observance and education has been evident across the entire denominational spectrum, in homes, synagogues, and seminaries. Day schools and day-school enrollments, moreover, have multiplied. This phenomenal growth, especially outside metropolitan New York, has affected Orthodox, Conservative,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Reform Judaism alike, producing a new generation of Jewish youth and young adults who are better educated and more observant than their parents. If the day-school movement continues to grow, it will offer the chance of a transformative long-term impact on the religious and spiritual life of American Judaism.

DAVID G. DALIN, *a Conservative rabbi, is associate professor of American Jewish history at the University of Hartford, and visiting associate professor of Jewish philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. His most recent book (with Jonathan D. Sarna) is the forthcoming* Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience.

Elliot N. Dorff

HUMAN BEINGS have no unmediated knowledge; we rather have to construct our conceptions of things on the basis of the experiences we have. The more a given concept fits the sense data which it is trying to describe, the more adequate that concept is to our experience and the closer it is to what we can know of the truth.

I believe in a personal God because I find that construction of reality to be most adequate in describing and explaining my experience. Unlike Spinoza, who saw human notions of personality as the product of our limited intelligence, I think that personality is part of ultimate metaphysical reality, and so I need to build personality into my conception of God if it is to be adequate. I believe, then, in a personal God Who interacts with us individually and collectively, as much female as male in characteristics. The *siddur*, the Jewish prayer book, has been especially helpful to me in formulating my belief because it identifies the kinds of normal human experiences, and the reactions to them, which can serve as the motivation and ground of faith.

As a teenager growing up in Milwaukee, I was president of a number of organizations and active in yet others. My decision to observe the Sabbath and *kashrut* at age fifteen, motivated by a series of discussions at the Conservative movement's Camp Ramah, therefore came at a real social price. I disappeared from my friends' world from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, and I ordered salads and fish when they ordered a Big Boy. It was from that experience that I learned what it means to be commanded. I also learned a form of observing the commandments which still made it possible for me to live in the broader world.

Jewish religious law is authoritative for me both as the practice of my people and as God's revelation. Our understanding of what God wants of us, however, continually develops, a position which the rabbis of the Talmud held, too. We must determine the content of Jewish law, however, as a community, not solely as individuals, for otherwise Jewish law loses its coherence and authority. The evolving nature of our community and of our understanding of revelation explains why we need to make adjustments in Jewish law, dropping or reinterpreting some of the practices in the tradition and adding others.

Jewish law, properly understood, deals not only with rituals, important as they are, but with the moral issues which face us. Thus in recent years I have written *responsa*, or legal opinions, for the Conservative movement's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, on issues like infertility, end-of-life dilemmas, and privacy in cyberspace, as well as a *Rabbinic Letter on Intimate Relations*.

When called in synagogue to recite the blessings for a reading from the Torah, I say, with the tradition, "Blessed are You, God . . . Who has chosen us from all peoples," but without any of the disdain for other religions and cultures which that phrase connotes for some Jews who use it. On the contrary, I have been heavily involved in interfaith dialogue, and that is only possible if one respects others and is even prepared to learn from them.

At the same time, I have no doubt about my own Jewish identity, both because it is mine, the heritage of my ancestors, and also because, after conscientiously studying the other secular and religious ways in which people throughout the world have thought about their lives and lived them, I find Judaism to be incredibly wise. Like Amos (3:2), being a chosen people means, for me, that we are called to special responsibility to lead exemplary lives and to improve the world.

Underlying this stance is a constant recognition that human beings are not omniscient and that therefore any understanding of God's nature and of what God wants of us, including my own, will inevitably be a partial one, open to error and improvement. I believe strongly in Judaism's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"fix" on life; but I simultaneously believe that people who hold other beliefs can be intelligent and morally sensitive and can even teach me how to deepen my own Jewish faith.

Jews must strive to improve the world; that is our mission. Non-Jews may share in that mission, and ultimately the messianic era will be one in which Jews and non-Jews cooperate in making this world ideal. Modern communications and transportation have made it abundantly clear that any messianic view which speaks of Jews alone is, to that extent, unrealistic and inadequate; we are all indeed part of a global village. For that reason I prefer Micah's vision of pluralism (4:1-5) over Isaiah's monotheism (2:1-4).

The Holocaust is undoubtedly a most egregious example of the depths to which humans can sink, but it does not, despite the arguments suggested to the contrary, pose a philosophical problem for Judaism different from other examples of human depravity. For free will to mean anything, bad uses of it must be possible. A small child dying of leukemia is, in fact, philosophically more difficult to reconcile with a benign God than is the Holocaust. I ache for victims of natural and human evil, and I need to work to eliminate them both.

I am privileged to live during the time of the Jewish return to the state of Israel. I glory in its Jewish creativity and in the goad Israel provides for Diaspora Jews to enrich their own Jewish lives. I do not, however, think that Israel is the only place where Jewish life can be lived; Israel and the Diaspora both can and must teach each other. The greatest gift which American Judaism can impart to Israel is a sense of pluralism in Jewish expression.

The greatest American stimuli to Jewish belief are the revival of serious religious belief among Christians and the increasing recognition of the emptiness of a life lived exclusively on a secular plane. The greatest challenges arise, ironically, from the degree to which Jews have been accepted in America, to the point of intermarriage, and from the Jewish emphasis on education which has led Jews to postpone marriage, often until it is too late to have children. We need to invest much more effort and money in Jewish education and in cross-denominational efforts to enable young Jews to meet each other, and we must provide the encouragement and child support for them to have three or four children per couple if we are to survive as a people and as a faith.

The denominations in American Judaism are a healthy expression of pluralism. As the ancient homilists of the Midrash recognized, each person standing at Sinai heard God in his or her unique way, and we are not all alike today, either. We dare not, however, let difference translate into division, for that will make it impossible to accomplish our common Jewish ends. The community should remove monetary support from those factions which refuse to cooperate with the rest of us.

Will there be a large-scale revival of Judaism in America? Yes, but only if we wisely cultivate the many and diverse expressions of interest in evidence now, even among those who have intermarried. Most resources should be devoted to helping people seriously interested in Judaism deepen their faith and that of their children, but we need to remain open as well to those gingerly making their way back into Judaism.

ELLIOT N. DORFF, *a Conservative rabbi, is rector and professor of philosophy at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles.*

David Ellenson

FOR MY ancestors, the truth of Jewish tradition was self-evident. In contrast, my readings in the social sciences make me aware that my Judaism is in large measure the product of arbitrary forces. There is self-recognition on my part that my faith and identity as a Jew are embedded in culture, and also that my beliefs are to a great extent the products of subjective choices.

This self-awareness robs me of the dogmatic certainty I imagine was possessed by most of my forebears and some of my contemporary co-religionists. In light of this, I could never state my own personal beliefs with either the precision or confidence the first set of questions in this symposium appears to demand. Simultaneously, I feel challenged and moved to respond as a Jew to their stark simplicity. They make me quite conscious of how visceral my faith and identity as a Jew are despite my acknowledgment that reality is by and large the product of social construction.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I see my Jewishness as a fortuitous given that defines my human condition. It is how I have been placed into the world. The narrative of Judaism provides the framework within which I situate my life. The Jewish story is my story. Its tale informs how I approach and relate to the world. It tells me that the world is unredeemed and causes me not only to distrust but to proclaim as false and dangerous claims made by any individual or group that a single person is the messiah. Instead, the thrust of my messianism is found in the Torah's command that I shall not oppress or vex the stranger. I was a stranger in Egypt and know the pain and distress that mark the stranger's heart. I am therefore obligated as a Jew to work for the repair of the human condition.

I do not attach metaphysical significance to either the Holocaust or the establishment of the state of Israel. I hear no 614th commandment emanating from Auschwitz that implores me, as the theologian Emil L. Fackenheim once put it, not to hand Hitler posthumous victories. Nor can I recite that phrase in our liturgy which asserts that the state of Israel constitutes the beginning of the flowering of our redemption. Such supernatural readings of the seminal events of the modern Jewish experience rub against my naturalistic grain.

Nevertheless, I know that my life as a Jew is never an autonomous one. Judaism for me is never a personal matter, closed and individual. In my thoughts, in my feelings of joy and pain, I find myself connected with the rest of my people. As a result, both the Holocaust and the state of Israel are omnipresent events which provide many of the contours within which I understand and live my life. I am a Jew for whom to be means to belong to the people Israel. My Judaism is carnal—embedded in community and land.

At the same time, I do know that the tradition is congruent with my deepest needs and sentiments as a person. I need the fellowship of others. The Jewish calendar bestows meaning upon my existence. It provides linkages to others and in so doing grants stability and order to my life.

While the rituals of Judaism which help me pass through the stages and seasons of life are indispensable, I could never identify which elements of the Torah are the gifts of divinity. After all, I do believe that our tradition and our symbols—mediated as they are through human agency—are at best fragile and tentative gropings for the reality of the divine whose presence they purport to represent in the world. They point toward, but could never fully contain, God, Whose fullness must be beyond all words and rituals. The observances associated with Torah nevertheless inexplicably provide me with momentary glimpses of the divine. At times I perceive what others have labeled signals of transcendence in the interactions and fellowship provided by the rhythms of life within the orbit of this people Israel and its community. Such experiences remind me that there is a mystery and infinity that lie at the heart of religion and culture. This is my personal faith.

To assess the contemporary religious scene in America I return to the social sciences. I take seriously the notion of secularization as a concept for understanding what is occurring to Jews in the United States today. By the term secularization, I mean the process whereby religion comes to be confined to certain distinct precincts of life. Religion does not completely disappear in such a situation. Instead, for many, religion becomes irrelevant. That is, it neither guides nor directs a majority, or even a substantial segment, of the diffuse commitments and values that mark the lives of most persons today. Ours is a community that has been shaped and informed by this process.

As American Jews, we are highly acculturated and largely welcomed in this society. The majority of Jews in this country pursue lives and affirm general values that make us virtually indistinguishable from the general public. Our lives no longer move from a Jewish center to the larger world, and the *Gemeinschaften* of yore are a thing of the past. This does not mean that Judaism has no place in the lives of most American Jews. However, that presence is episodic. Participation in the community is all too often confined exclusively to circumscribed moments surrounding the life cycle.

This indicates that Judaism—sadly, in my opinion—constitutes at best a residual commitment among a majority of American Jews. I believe that such a Judaism lacks the power and substance to transmit Jewish values, culture, and identity to subsequent generations. I am, therefore, pessimistic about the durability of Judaism in the lives of most American Jews. It is why I do not predict a large-scale revival of Judaism among the Jews of our country.

At the same time, I recognize that there has been a major revitalization of Jewish religious, intellectual, and cultural life in this nation. Jewish identity and commitment in America have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not simply been subject to atrophy and death despite the relentless and ubiquitous pressures of the modern world and its culture. Commitment to Jewish study and religious observance are increasing among significant pockets of our people. The same conditions I bemoaned in the previous paragraph for dissolving the force of Jewish tradition in the contemporary setting do not serve as a solvent alone. In a world all too often rootless and unanchored, Judaism will continue to offer the enduring power of community and spirituality to those who choose it. Judaism can and will flourish for those Jews in this world of freedom.

All this leads me to conclude that a minority of Jews have the capacity to sustain themselves and even strengthen their commitments to Jewish religion, culture, and identity despite the tendencies of the majority. The most significant division in the contemporary Jewish community is therefore between that minority of Jews for whom Judaism is at the center of their lives and the majority for whom it is peripheral at best. There will of course be ongoing and growing disputes between Orthodox Jews and members of the more liberal Jewish denominations. I do not expect this to diminish in the near future. Nor is this unprecedented in Jewish history.

On the other hand, my analysis does not lead me to exaggerate notions of divisions among Reform and Conservative Jews. While elite elements in each of the movements surely have different understandings regarding the nature of Judaism, the Jews who inhabit these movements are simply too homogenous to make the divisions a cause for ongoing communal concern.

Throughout history, Jews and Judaism have been tested. We are, as the late historian Simon Rawidowicz put it, "an ever-dying people." We in America have not escaped this eternal Jewish condition. Our community and faith are challenged now as before. Yet our people has endured. Our culture and identity have proved resilient in the past. I expect no less in the future.

DAVID ELLENSON *is I.H. and Anna Grancell professor of Jewish religious thought at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform) in Los Angeles.*

Michael Fishbane

I AM IN my innermost core a religious person, whose spiritual sensibilities are shaped by Judaism. At the center of this religiosity is a theological perspective that senses in the manifold vitality of being (as experienced within my self, and in the world of persons and things) the infinite formulations of the divine Name, and that feels compelled (even commanded) to respond to this vitality as a spiritual task whose ends are sanctification and service. The human naming of this divine vitality is given through tradition and interpretation. As a Jew, I live fundamentally within the framework of Jewish forms of naming and their possibilities. But I am also a person whose humanity is affected by the forms that this vitality has taken throughout history. These, too, give the divine a human image.

I thus look on the world with two eyes—the eye of faith and faithfulness, and the eye of difference and doubt; but I act upon it with one body. The eye of faith hopes that the language and actions of Judaism will lead to a life of sanctity and sanctification, while personal and historical verification of Judaism's spiritual path keeps me faithful to its ongoing values. By contrast, the eye of difference and doubt knows that there are other values, religions, and possibilities under heaven. It keeps the eye of faith honest and spiritually humble. I therefore live in spiritual commitment to God as revealed through historical Judaism, and with consciousness of intellectual and religious alternatives, great or small. This is not a split life, but one that tries to live the religious possibilities of Judaism with perspective. My body is the vehicle of this enactment, enhancing or distorting the expressions of divine vitality through human words and deeds. Judaism is a challenge and a guide on my way.

The term "belief" with respect to God is not religiously real to me, being too static and ideational. I understand theology in more relational terms, and am thus more concerned with standing firmly and responsively before the living God—Whose presence is the changing face of persons and things. The dynamic connection that happens at these moments of awareness and commitment is covenantal in a root sense, demanding both hearing and doing. Sinai is for me the paradigmatic expression of such meetings between God's presence and persons; and Israel's collective response, "We shall do and hear" (Ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

odus 24:7), is emblematic of the silent or spoken commitments made in relationship to God. These commitments (accumulated through tradition and personal experience) express my values and obligations. In my understanding, faithfulness to God's reality includes the struggle to keep these values primary in the storm of events. Sinai thus brings the nameless vitality of God into the moral sphere, demanding attentive responsibility.

For me, then, the Torah and the commandments are from heaven; but their authority and formulation rest with the leaders, interpreters, and members of the community over time. Thus all is subject to the greatness and perversity, or to the fidelities and infidelities, of the human imagination. Moreover, for me, while a voice spoke at Sinai, not everything was heard or done at that time. Thus I understand the phrase "We shall do and hear" as an assent in the present and a commitment to the future, as a commitment to tradition and the extension of the voice of Sinai through interpretation. For while the Torah is immutable, the tradition is not, and must responsibly guard and shape the holy spirit in its keeping.

I try to be faithful to the whole law and, in the doing, raise its abstract duties to direct and personal commandments. But I am not always successful. I also try to be faithful to the spirit of the law, and counteract problematic developments or applications by recourse to its own highest principles. But I am not always successful, and some rules move off center. The voice of God is therefore not always present to me in the tradition. Indeed, that voice is often heard from elsewhere—in the texts and expressions of other religions, for example; but also in art and much more. I try to bring this hearing into Jewish tradition. But the main task is to stay on a spiritual path.

In its crude forms, the notion of Israel's chosenness can lead to vulgar triumphalism and self-idolatry. This in my view is a perversion of the holy spirit. Nevertheless I recite this notion in religious worship, where it is bound to positive values and obligations. The paradox must be withstood, for at its highest reach a theology of chosenness articulates a sense of divine destiny in and through the realization of certain behaviors or attitudes. For Israel and Judaism, I believe that two tasks are basic. The first is to stand firm on behalf of unity, so that differences are honored and divisiveness resisted; and the second is to stand firm against idolatry, so that self-interest and myopia do not pervert or reduce messianic ideals. In my view, true messianism must hold out against small-mindedness for God's sake. The faithful Jew feels "chosen" by these tasks.

I was born during World War II and came to religious and moral consciousness with the Holocaust and the state of Israel as pivotal historical realities. They have remained so, dominating my mind through images as much as reflective thought. Any epitomization of their effect on my life feels hollow. Perhaps honesty can only point to some enduring sensibilities shaped by these events. I thus confess, on the one hand, to an inescapable attention to the abysses within culture and human desire; the snake is coiled around the tree of knowledge with primordial guile, always. On the other hand, the existence of Israel compels my assent to the resilience of hope and a commitment to its physical embodiment. Concrete reality must be the sphere of moral and spiritual verification. As a religious person, I try to keep both matters in mind. The work of sanctification depends on it. I take the dangers and nearness of desecration very seriously.

Perhaps the climate of spiritual and moral anomie may induce some individuals to the principles and patterns of Jewish life; but I am neither impressed with nor hopeful about the ideological or social huddles that often result. A defensive spirit drains Judaism of its spiritual daring. Even more debilitating for "Jewish belief" is the erasure of anomie by thinly disguised fundamentalisms. Here, the language of faith is regularly used to justify the justifiers. I find such apologetics uninteresting.

Equally disquieting to me is technological philistinism in American life. Formatted Jewish data and their easy retrieval are no substitute for the patience and cyclical patterns of traditional learning. This shift in rhythm twists Judaism in the wind of blowhards and reduces public discourse to sermonic sound-bites. In my view, Judaism is grounded in the elemental rhythms of breathing, speaking, and reading, and in the daily patterns of light and dark, food and fellowship. Modernity conspires against this. Sanctification is meaningless in such a take-out/print-out world.

Ideological divisions affecting religious thought and practice are as old as the Bible. What is particularly new are the forms of difference affecting notions of canon, conviction, and community in contemporary American Judaism—and their increasing isolation from each other. Distinct Judaisms are forming within our

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

midst, responsible to different authorities. Little consensus exists on any of the fundamentals governing the religious polity (including rabbinic authority, genealogy, and rights over one's body or what it hosts). I suspect that these positions will become further ingrown and self-justifying, leaving American Judaism splintered and sectarian. I am dismayed by the prospects, yet I also try to seek out like-minded Jews for fellowship and worship. Common, nonideological projects (like study and charity) may cross certain boundaries; but I doubt that a common language or ritual will arise, and without these the future is futile.

I am a pessimistic optimist about Jewish revival in America—combining a sense of realism with the will to labor for the future; but I find the prospect of a large-scale revival simply incomprehensible. The forces sucking the spirit from Judaism are larger. Spiritual resistance is the only response, for the sake of our souls. That is work enough.

MICHAEL FISHBANE *is Nathan Cummings professor of Jewish studies at the University of Chicago.*

Barry Freundel

THE NARROW range of physical parameters required of the universe in order to sustain life, the almost infinite intricacy of the human genome, the miracle of birth—all speak, to those willing to listen, of the presence of a heavenly hand. While many in the scientific community have turned on its head the classic argument from design, insisting that scientific description of natural phenomena banishes God from the universe, quite the opposite is true. Were God to run the universe through constant supernatural intervention, He would be the cosmic equivalent of the president of a multinational corporation who spent his time sorting the mail. Instead, the robust functioning of life and human existence so close to the edge of a scientifically much more logical nonexistence should at the very least challenge the core of anyone's disbelief.

Chosenness means what it has always meant. Our people were given a message and a mission designed to help bring a shared morality to the world. We were not asked to bring Judaism to the world, just fundamental basic morality. Certainly the need for moral guidance is everywhere evident today. This poses two significant challenges. First, we must not give up on our belief in absolute values—frankly, without values we have nothing to offer the world. Second, we are required to live by these values so that we can serve as role models in the moral enterprise of helping to weave a better life for all humankind.

No more fructifying idea exists in Jewish life than that of the messiah. From Lubavitch to Reform to Zionism (both secular and religious), the idea of radically breaking with history and creating a world far better than previously known has carried Judaism through its confrontation with modernity. Even the most politically conservative Jew knows that this world has a long way to go, even if it must travel back to and through tradition to get there. It is the messianic promise of a radically better future that, as much as anything else, keeps us at our task.

The Holocaust has dual meaning for me. On the one hand, it is our era's embodiment of the problem of theodicy, the justification of God's goodness in view of the existence of evil. On the other hand, the Holocaust is also the great moral termite in modernity's woodpile. The modern state, 20th-century technology, contemporary culture, indeed all of modernity's great accomplishments were used by the Nazis in the service of perhaps the worst evil in history. Modernity, particularly secular modernity, needs to respond to its own theodicy problem.

For us as Jews, our task in light of this tragedy, as it is in response to all tragedies, is to live meaningfully in its aftermath. A heightened sense of the preciousness of every Jew, of the sanctity of life, and of the need to combat evil wherever it may appear are the beginnings of the path to that end.

The establishment of the state of Israel is, to me, further evidence of the workings of an unseen hand in history. Celebration of that event is critical. First, whatever semblance of unity remains within the Jewish community can only be found in the Holocaust-Israel nexus. Further, insofar as Israel is concerned, God's affirmative answer to two millennia of Jewish prayers must be recognized. I have no idea how those who do not allow the events of 1948 and beyond to affect the essence of their Jewish experiences will respond when God asks at their final judgment how they could have been so ungrateful.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The great cultural schism today is between advocates of autonomy and advocates of authority. For those who live lives of radical autonomy, the moral universe is entirely self-contained and nothing exists beyond the infinite "me." I am Thinker, Utterer, Hearer, Thought, Word . . . I am the One and yet the All in All.

Locating the source of moral authority internally is fundamentally and unalterably at odds with religion's message and purpose. One who locates authority inside himself has no need for God's authority.

The problem is that autonomy is seductive. It is far easier to respond to myself than to an objective set of standards, and the self-aggrandizement and pseudo-ego boost of following "my choice" attract the modern mind. But autonomy is, at the same time, intellectually and behaviorally nonrigorous, severely limited in its capacity to measure failure as opposed to success. It makes emotions and feelings the arbiters of behavior, and denies any purpose to transcendence other than the purely emotional. It is, therefore, ultimately unsatisfying. "Me," if truly left alone, is nothing but a wretched, infinitesimally small dot in the time-space continuum of the universe, like the dot in Edward A. Abbott's 19th-century classic, *Flatland*. Is it any wonder that insecurity, meaninglessness, and a painful lack of self-worth and self-confidence are the almost-universal psychic afflictions of the day?

Society and the language of contemporary politics and culture provide the necessary wherewithal for today's autonomous dots to ignore voices calling from the outside, and to pride themselves on doing so. Overcoming this is the great challenge. However, since at the core of autonomy lies meaninglessness, voices from the outside can indeed occasionally connect with the turmoil within.

Jewish religious unity is critically, if not mortally, wounded. Those like me who have tried to find common ground and serve as a bridge across the great divide have to admit that the greater movement in the past few years has been in the opposite direction, toward separating the two banks of the chasm. My plea to those on the Left and Right who have decided that their narrow agendas are more important than any semblance of national unity is that they stop and consider the consequences of their actions before continuing down this self-destructive path.

Since I believe that the autonomous vision of modernity and postmodernity is a failure, I believe it will ultimately falter. The conservative revolution in America and around the world is, in my view, driven primarily not by economics but by a sense that the moral quality of life is collapsing. Not only does such a collapse produce obvious societal problems, it also leaves life void of meaning and purpose.

A Jewish revival is possible, primarily because Jewish tradition speaks so well to the life of meaning. The great need will be to find thinkers and teachers who can offer the water of Jewish tradition to those thirsting in the deserts of modernity.

I do not forecast an Orthodox revival, necessarily, but I do see a developing commitment to serious Jewish involvement by many people. The challenge for Jewish leadership is to make the opportunity to do so available and the means to do so accessible.

BARRY FREUNDEL *is the rabbi of Kesher Israel, an Orthodox congregation in Washington, D.C., and vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America and chairman of its ethics committee. He is also adjunct professor of law at Georgetown University.*

David Gelernter

ANY JEW is entitled to struggle with the simple question, "Do you believe in God?" Of the two passages that define for me the theological essence of Judaism, one is the famous discussion in the Talmud (*Menahot* 29b) between God and Moses; Moses in heaven is granted a vision of the greatest of talmudic rabbis, Akiva ben Yosef, and then asks about the reward for such saintliness and scholarship as Akiva's. "Turn around," God says, and there is Akiva, done to death by the Romans. "*Zu Torah*," Moses demands, "*v'zu s'khorah?*"—This is Torah, and this its reward? "Be quiet," God tells him. "That has occurred to me."

I understand these words to assert that, at times, God Himself does not believe in God. No message is clearer in the Torah than a Jew's obligation to struggle with God ("Israel" *means* struggler-with-God, according to Genesis 32:29). Abraham the Founder lays out the classical Jewish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

approach when he asks God, with the greatest respect and transparent outrage, suppose there are a few *good* people in Sodom? "*Will you actually sweep away the righteous with the wicked?*" (Genesis 18:23). God and the Jews have been struggling ever since.

The standard rabbinic formulation holds, with Exodus 24:7, that "*nishma* (we shall heed) follows *na'aseh* (we shall do)"—believing is a consequence of acting. The nature of Judaism is to create a shared body of spiritual experience, not belief. This "shared body" is hard to explain because it has no analog. Maybe it is a sort of song that transcends its singers and goes on forever, or an ocean where the far shore is distant in time as well as space. In any case, it is natural for a Jew to struggle with the transcendence offered by communal religious experience just as he struggles with belief. Natural for him to fight against dissolving his personality (even temporarily) into a bigger whole; also natural to give in sometimes and come out the better for it.

Today the shared body of experience is almost defunct, and struggle is outmoded. Like most American Jews, I find myself able to observe only a tiny fraction of the Torah's commandments. Unlike some, I believe that the commandments *are* binding. When I fail to perform a religious obligation, I do not want a soothing Reform or Conservative authority to tell me I am in luck—that particular obligation has been dropped from the new edition and I am free to ignore it. I am not free to ignore it and commit a sin when I fail to do it. I acknowledge my failings and recall that God is merciful. But I want to look real Judaism in the eye and come to grips with it every day—to imitate in a small way Jacob struggling with the angel even if, unlike Jacob, I always lose.

This is an uneasy, unhealthy response to Judaism, but at least it is a response. The failure of modern Judaism is the failure of modern America: the infantilization of our institutions and culture. If you lack the knowledge or concentration to read *Paradise Lost*, you might insist that the thing be cut down to size and translated into prose. Now you can read it but no longer want to—and Reform and Conservative Judaism (although we ought to acknowledge with respect and gratitude that they were serious attacks on a hard problem) have failed; we ought to admit it and move on.

I was at a wedding a few weeks ago that captured modern Judaism in microcosm. It used to be that a Jewish bride and a Gentile groom would avoid the embarrassment of a religious ceremony that mocked both communities—but ethnic identification is big nowadays, and a Reform rabbi was duly reeled in. Naturally the bride and groom concocted their own ceremony. Why *ought* a bride to hear in Hebrew the dry legal formula, "You are sanctified to me with this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel," instead of "I promise to help you grow as a person" (their very words!), *et cetera*?

Because Jewish brides listened to the dry talmudic formula in 1954, in 1943, in 1935, in 1648, in 1066. Had this bride deigned to listen too, she would have honored them and asked their blessings. If the rabbi had chanted the traditional seven Hebrew blessings instead of speaking a shortened, modernized version in *Time*-magazine English, his song would have resonated with a million others through the centuries like a small instrument in a big mellow hall, and what was lost in chattiness would have been gained in dignity. Jewish ritual practice *does* change, but is intended to change at a slow walk, the way you move a full glass. The whole point of a wedding ceremony is to offer the couple a chance to enter into something bigger than themselves. But in modern America, there is nothing bigger than yourself.

The infantile insistence that religious ritual conform to you rather than the other way around is the essence of modern American culture, and is strangling Judaism. The American Jewish community needs to be reconstituted around a new kind of orthodoxy, which most of us (granted) will merely look at instead of plunging into; but it is mere empirical fact that only orthodox prayer and study have the power to keep the community together. Every Reform and Conservative synagogue ought to provide an orthodox *minyan* too (put it in the basement somewhere); most Jews have never once been part of one. The Orthodox community ought to regard itself as strictly obligated, in turn, to invite unorthodox Jews to synagogue and urge them to come at least once, even if they drive and park right out front and spend all Sabbath morning obliviously jingling their change. Merely following the traditional ritual is no guarantee (of course) of genuine religious feeling; if the typical Orthodox congregation were to move in the direction of hasidic ceremonial, that might be a good thing, too.

None of this is awfully likely to happen. "Being Jewish in America" will come to mean, in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time, approximately what "being Scottish in America" means: nothing. Certain family names will suggest Jewish or Scottish origins.

When I was a child, my grandfather used to take me on Saturday evenings to a yeshiva belonging to the Bobover Hasidim in the Borough Park neighborhood of Brooklyn. We sat or stood in a dim packed room where the elderly *rebbe* presided at the head of a long table; I remember his black Sabbath coat, embroidered in rust-orange satin. The ritual of *melaveh malkah*, accompanying the Sabbath queen, is a hasidic specialty: in their reluctance to let the Sabbath go, they sing and pray into the night long after it is technically over.

When we first started making these visits I was too young to understand much of anything, but it didn't matter. The songs mostly had no words and you could sing whether you understood or not. The song in this overflowing study room was the song of a super-organism of many people, Jews living and dead: one song without end that you hear occasionally like pounding surf in the dark; the pulse of Judaism, beating the long tables in time to the music.

The other of the two pronouncements on which Jewish theology seems to me to rest is a statement made by many kabbalists, for instance Nahmanides (1194-1270) in the introduction to his Torah commentary: "the whole Torah consists of nothing but names of God." By reinterpreting the words, running some together and dividing others, you can read the Torah as a sequence of divine names or epithets. The obvious objection is that, when you do, you annihilate the plain sense. To which a kabbalist has to respond: that is exactly the point; transcendence is not available in human language. But if you let go of the meanings, you may possibly catch a glimpse of it.

My wedding couple threw out the song of Judaism because they didn't like the words—but the words didn't matter anyway, in the end, and they were left with Milton in prose; and so are we all.

David Gelernter *is a contributing editor of the* City Journal *and* National Review, *and art critic for the* Weekly Standard. *He is the author of* 1939: The Lost World of the Fair, *and is currently at work on a new book*, David King of Israel.

Marc Gellman

God is not some problem I constitute, but rather that mystery within which I myself am constituted. I believe that God is the author of all moral laws, and of those ritual laws that link me to the sacred rhythms of Jewish time and space. When a ritual conflicts with the ethical teachings of Judaism, that ritual must be altered or abandoned. I believe that God has implanted within us eternal life, and I am bewildered and saddened by the widespread ignorance of this ancient and authentic Jewish belief. The World to Come is not an addition to but an essential part of my belief in God. It is the way the moral equilibrium of existence is restored, the way God's ultimate goodness is affirmed, and the way I am able to sustain the hope that I will not be separated forever from those I have loved.

Religions are open or tribal. You can join an open faith (Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism) by affirming its beliefs. You can join a tribal faith (Hinduism, Native American religions) only by being born into the tribe. Judaism is the only religion in the world that is both tribal and open. One is Jewish by birth, and yet one can convert to Judaism by affirming its beliefs and committing oneself to the practices that flow from those beliefs. The chosenness of the Jewish people has enabled the tribal and open elements of our faith to exist over time in a number of dialectical tensions: we believe that we are a people apart, and yet we believe that we are a light to all the nations. We accept those without belief as full Jews, and yet we created monotheism. The open elements of our faith keep us (I pray) from becoming racist xenophobes, while the tribal elements of our faith keep us from becoming rootless cosmopolitans.

Aristotle believed that all evil was merely the absence of good. I believe Auschwitz refutes Aristotle. The Holocaust was not just some horribly mistaken pursuit of the good, but willed radical evil. Radical evil on a smaller but still terrifying level persists in our time, and yet we, the survivors of the kingdom of night, often seem indifferent to the night that has descended upon Bosnia and Cambodia, Somalia and Rwanda, and upon the 40,000 children in this wounded world who will starve to death today. "Never Again" does not mean never again to Jews, it means never again to anyone. In the face of welcome moves by the Catholic Church to confront and atone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for its anti-Jewish elements, I also worry that we are teaching the Holocaust in a manner that reinforces the inevitability of Christian anti-Semitism and therefore prevents a new generation of Jews from ever trusting in the sincerity of Christian repentance.

Israel is not merely a political entity, not only a homeland for the storm-tossed of our people. For me, Israel is Zion. It is the place where heaven and earth kiss, the place where tribe and faith merge into a seamless millennial hymn, the place where our people have returned to political power and historical hope. After 48 years I am still thrilled by its rebirth, and constantly amazed and uplifted by Israel's ability to transform Jewish identity. I even consider the act of eating felafel on Tel Aviv's Dizengoff Street as a true miracle. Even as the Orthodox political parties continue to strangle progressive Judaism, my Zionism has not grown weaker, but hotter for the struggle to ensure Jewish diversity in the Jewish state.

The greatest stimulus to Jewish belief in our time comes from the spiritual poverty of the secular world. The growing consensus among thinkers on both the Right and the Left that the secular city is spiritually unsustaining could well lead to a revival of faith across religious lines. But if people do return, they must not be subjected to the sanctification of every bourgeois atavism under the guise of a religious truth. They must hear more of what we Jews believe and less of what we doubt, more Jewish texts and less book and movie reviews, more hope and less despair. They must hear rabbis and thinkers who have the guts to say "no" to the culture. They must hear "yes" to a personal faith but "no" to a narcissistic spirituality.

They must hear a "yes" to the value of the family and "no" to all the forces that weaken families. They must hear how intermarriage is bad for us even if it is good for them. They must hear that our faith is true, but that there are many ways up the mountain of the Lord. They must hear that happiness is not the fruit of acquisitiveness, but the fruit of duty. In short, they must hear more and more about Judaism and less and less about the culture which, despite its freedoms and its glitz, has betrayed their souls, their families, their faith, and their tribe.

The obstacle to any possible renewal of Jewish belief is, paradoxically, the very same secular culture that has made such a renewal necessary. As spiritually and morally barren as the culture seems to me, its appeal cannot be gainsaid. Advertising and its myriad delivery systems inoculate many to the appeal of faith. Teenage television programs and popular sitcoms never show kids going to pray, loving learning, or respecting adults. Music whose lyrics degrade women, clothing ads that sexually exploit children, and drugs that numb the mind and kill the soul may be abominations to our faith, but they are wildly popular among the members of our tribe. Winning at all costs has produced an epidemic of cheating and lying, but winners are munificently rewarded.

This is why, despite the testimony of soup kitchens and AIDS shelters run by religious organizations, despite the dramatically lower divorce rates among those who pray together regularly as a family, and despite the virtue of our ancestors and of religious exemplars like Martin Luther King, Jr., Abraham Joshua Heschel, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mother Teresa, many of our children, and many of us, have bought into the lie that religion is the source of our limitation rather than the source of our fulfillment. The last socially acceptable prejudice in America is the prejudice against those who take their faith seriously, and any possible Jewish renewal awaits the abolition of that prejudice, and the transformation of the culture that created and sustains it.

I believe that Jewish denominational divisions have largely outlived their usefulness. The only division that counts for me is the division between serious and non-serious Jews. I admire those who are open to any Jewish ritual that can deepen their Jewish life, to all Jewish values that can both inform and offer a critique of their moral choices, and to all the songs, burdens, and joys of our extraordinary faith and tribe.

My daily life is not altered one iota by predictions for or against a large-scale revival of Judaism in America. I still wake up every day trying to serve God, study Torah, do *mitzvot*, keep my evil inclination in check, and sustain my deepest hopes that the good in us will win, that the covenant will not be broken, that the naked will be clothed, that the hungry will be fed, and that the ones who sleep in the dust will one day be lifted up. For me only the trying matters, everything else is not my business.

MARC GELLMAN *is rabbi of Temple Beth Torah (Reform) in Melville, New York.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Neil Gillman

WHENEVER I am asked if I believe in God, I respond, "Tell me what you mean by God and I'll tell you if I believe in that God." On this issue, I insist that God transcends human understanding and language. That is what makes God God. To believe that human beings can comprehend God is idolatry, the cardinal Jewish sin.

The alternative to idolatry or worshipful silence is the claim that all characterizations of God are metaphors crafted by human beings. Metaphors combine to form myths. To the invariable question, "Do we then invent God?" I respond, "No, we discover God and create the metaphors/myths which reflect our varied human experiences of God." My faith is that these experiences are true, not in any objective sense of that term but subjectively, existentially. Our human experiences of God are objectively neither verifiable nor falsifiable. Finally, by myth, I mean not a fiction but rather a structure of meaning whereby human beings make sense of their life-experience. However "broken," that myth remains very much alive for me.

Much of the complex metaphorical system through which Jews have portrayed God remains vital for me. I affirm that God is unique, personal, transcendent; that God cares deeply about human life and history; that God has entered into a special relationship with the Jewish people; and that God creates, reveals, and will ultimately redeem. These metaphors flow from our ancestors' varied experiences of God in nature, history, and in their individual lives, and they have in turn continued to inform the experience of generations of Jews to this day.

Metaphors can reveal, but they can also blind. Therefore I also affirm our own right and responsibility to discard those metaphors which contradict our own experiences of God and replace them with others. Every myth enjoys a certain plasticity; the process whereby Jews reformulate the contents of their myth is what we call midrash.

The claim that Torah is "revealed" by God reflects our ancestors' understanding of how and why their distinctive way of viewing themselves and their world was accepted as authoritative. The biblical account of revelation is classic myth—historiography, not history—or, as Abraham Joshua Heschel put it, itself a midrash. Torah then represents the canonical statement of our myth and our guide for conducting our individual and collective lives in the light of that vision. That our ancestors understood themselves to be "chosen," i.e., singled out by God, is the way they accounted for their distinctive experience of redemption.

The ultimate authority for what entered into Torah *ab initio*, and therefore the ultimate authority for what in Torah remains binding for any future generation, is a Jewish community—not all Jews at any one time, but those Jews in any generation for whom the myth remains alive. Inevitably, there will be many different, equally valid Jewish readings of that myth, and hence many different, equally authentic Jewish communities. The decision as to what readings are authentically Jewish is arrived at consensually within a committed community of Jews who have a stake in the process and in its outcome.

The notion that to be a Jew is to be bound to a covenant that entails specific obligations is the cornerstone of the classic Jewish myth. In our day, the individual Jew is free to choose his or her community, and one of the criteria for so doing is a determination of which commandments are binding for that individual. The Jew makes that decision out of the personal experience of being commanded, but also within the context of Jewish communities of the past and a Jewish community today. Ultimately, though I believe in self-obligation, I cannot function as a religious Jew without a *minyan*, i.e., without a community.

Eschatology is an integral part of the Jewish myth. It is the closing parenthesis (as the biblical myth of creation is the opening parenthesis) to the Jewish understanding of history. Just as there is no picture without a frame, so there is no sense to history without creation and eschatology. I affirm the universal, national, and personal dimensions of Jewish eschatology as integral to the Jewish myth. In particular, I affirm the doctrine of bodily resurrection, not as a biological statement but again as myth. It teaches me that God is more powerful than death, that my body is integral to my identity, and that history and society, both of which demand my bodily existence, are of ultimate importance to God.

Theologically, the Holocaust is one more striking instance of the fact that our experience of God in history is frequently eclipsed, that faith is not a constant but a momentary achievement, always challenged, and that moments in which God and faith are absent are also integral to the life of the religious Jew. Further, once we believe that God created us free, God must ac-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cept the inevitable fruits of that freedom, among which is our infinite capacity for evil.

Because I also believe that, however mysteriously, God works in human history, I believe that the creation of the state of Israel has religious significance; and, after a good deal of struggle, I have also come to believe that, despite all its ambiguities, it may also have redemptive significance. Whatever else it may represent, Israel is very much a human institution, and the process of redemption is neither progressive nor inevitable. But the very fact that we can now be masters of our own destiny, and that we have a setting for the potential engagement of Torah with the full range of issues posed by modernity, should be seen as a spark of the ultimate redemption to come.

I am not overly concerned with the issue of Jewish unity. My theology provides for pluralistic readings of God's will and I cherish that openness. Our major threat comes not from pluralism but rather from the insistence of some communities that only their reading of God's will is true and that other readings are heretical. Our most pressing problem is religious fundamentalism and literalism.

Despite the statistics, I am optimistic regarding the future of Judaism in America. I am overwhelmed by the religious creativity that has emerged in recent decades. We are far ahead of where we were when I first became a serious Jew in the 50's. Just look at the wealth of books on Judaism, the growth of Jewish scholarly activity, the flowering of liturgical and ritual creativity in liberal Jewish circles, the achievements of Jewish feminists, and the pockets of serious adult Jewish learning throughout the country—to mention only some of the evidence.

The noted Jewish historian Salo Baron, in the coda to his essay "The Modern Age," in *Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People* (1956), promises that if the American Jewish community could harbor a total of 500 first-rate scholars, writers, artists, rabbis, communal executives, and lay leaders, it would reach new heights of achievement. We surely harbor that number. We have always been redeemed by a saving remnant and that remnant is stronger today than it has been in generations.

NEIL GILLMAN, *a Conservative rabbi, teaches Jewish philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.*

David M. Gordis

IN STATING that I believe in God I affirm my belief in a dimension of human experience that transcends the everyday and that cannot be adequately accessed using common language. I am aware of that dimension of experience but can claim no knowledge of it. I am comfortable using "God language" to refer to it. I am, therefore, appropriately considered a religious agnostic. I do not believe that a personal, conscious deity manipulates and controls human affairs. I find myself constantly "in tension" with the nature and reality of what I refer to as God, yet it is satisfying and meaningful for me to speak of God as the ground of all being, as the embodiment of the potential for growth and moral excellence.

As a Jew, I accept the authority of Torah as the embodiment of my people's encounter with God as I understand God. The authority of Torah is absolute, but its content evolves through the ongoing experience of the Jewish people and through the continuing process of interpretation and confrontation. Torah both generates values which are authoritative and reflects values which continue to be shaped and reshaped, drawing on human experience and judgment. That process distinguishes between that which is timeless in Torah and that which is dated and no longer authoritative. While not an elegant process, it is at the heart of the living Jewish experience.

By and large, I reject the notion of chosenness. When I use the traditional liturgical formulation of the idea, I interpret it in the conventional way as uniqueness, and I reflect on the distinctive experience of the Jewish people and on our insights and contributions to civilization. We are a gifted people with a special history and a remarkable longevity. But every community and culture is unique and the concept of chosenness is more mischievous than useful.

Jews today are challenged to play a special role as an "abnormal" people, living on the margins of many societies and yet experiencing national rebirth. Our calling is to sustain our particular culture and civilization as we serve to remind the world of the dangers of power, of limitations on sovereignty, and of the universality of the human experience. The most pernicious forces at work in the world today are extreme nationalism and religious extremism. Through our historical experience, our religious and ideological diversity, and the range of political and social settings in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which Jews live, we can serve as living reminders of the dangers of these two great forces and of the incendiary threat at their intersection.

I understand messiah as a metaphor for a potential, dramatic transformation of the world into a place of justice, harmony, and peace. Whatever our understanding of God may be, the messianic age will come closer only through human efforts, and the messianic ideal is destined to remain never entirely fulfilled.

Along with the emergence of American Jewish life, the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel are the most prominent features on the landscape of contemporary Jewry. They have had a significant impact on my openness to the dimension of experience which I associate with God. They have not had an impact, however, on my religious or theological positions. God is not responsible for evil, even the depths of depravity represented by the Holocaust. God is not responsible for historical achievements, even those as notable as the reestablishment of the state of Israel. Both of these events have intensified my sense of Jewish identity and had a role in shaping it. Neither has created a theological crisis or generated a "eureka" experience.

The fragmentation of American life, what Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. has called the "disuniting" of America, and the deterioration of *loci* for the creative and positive interaction of groups which form the tapestry of American society, constitute both a challenge and an opportunity for American Judaism. The strengthening of the group focus of American subcultures has encouraged Jews in greater numbers to reattach themselves to Jewish institutions and to reengage with Jewish religion, culture, and civilization. On the other hand, since this fragmentation threatens the American experiment, Jews need to understand better our stake in the success of that experiment. An American failure would be a crushing blow to Jewish life.

More generally, the principal challenge to Jewish life in America is to navigate the poles of particularism and universalism. The attractions of general education and culture have created a generation of Jews for whom their own culture is literally and figuratively a closed book, and Jewish life cannot be sustained without a literate community. The open society and the acceptance of Jews by predominantly Christian America challenge Jews to strengthen the Jewish family and find ways of lowering the incidence of intermarriage.

Americans by and large take religion seriously, but American Jews have traditionally done so less than others. The growth of fundamentalist and traditionalist religious groups in America poses some political risks for Jews; there is, after all, a big difference between a predominantly Christian country which preserves the separation between church and state and a Christian America which abandons it. Whatever religious or theological positions Jews arrive at, however, a larger society which takes religion and religious values seriously is a good model. One must take religion quite seriously, after all, to be a nonbeliever!

I am concerned about civility and not about unity. The core issue for Jews (and for others as well) is how we deal with the otherness of others, both Jews of other religious, political, or ideological views and non-Jews. We are not one; significant lines of difference exist, most clearly between literalist Orthodoxy and others in the religious community. We need to understand that such differences can be a source of enhancement, that diversity is a virtue, more than we need to create an impression of unity and uniformity, which do not exist.

It may be that Jewish denominationalism has gone as far as it can go. Major religious thinkers in American Jewry cross denominational lines. Cultural, educational, and religious programs around the country increasingly bring together diverse denominational groups. New forms of synagogues and *havurot* (prayer groups) do not fall comfortably within denominations, and religious life on college campuses often softens or obliterates lines of denominational separation. My sense is that these energies are increasing and that this is a positive development. They will continue to grow, with the exception of traditionalist Orthodoxy.

Jews have never been a "large-scale" people, but, with that reservation, I firmly believe that we are on the threshold of substantial Jewish renewal in America and that, in fact, this renewal has already begun. The most remarkable reality of contemporary Jewish life is that the question we confront is not what will others do to Jews, but rather, what will Jews do about being Jewish. This is a truly radical departure from even recent Jewish reality. And Jews are beginning to respond. I know of no time in recent Jewish history when we have had access to so many intelligent, inquiring, and searching Jews. Many, to be sure, remain indifferent, but even for them the phenomenon of escape from Jewish identity has ended.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Developments in Israel and concerns about intermarriage have moved the issue of the creative vitality of Jewish life—"Jewish continuity," to use the slogan—to the center of attention of the Jewish community. In this case, the slogan can have an energizing value. Day schools, youth groups, summer camps, trips to Israel, a wide range of experiments in modes of learning and worship, the astounding proliferation of Jewish studies on American campuses, are all significant and promising developments. If there is increased investment in programs which are responsive to these probings and searchings, then we will see a transformation of the quality of Jewish life.

This is, of course, speculation. I tend to be optimistic, but neither optimism nor pessimism is the issue. The community as a whole needs to respond with openness, creativity, and high-quality opportunities for Jewish engagement, exploration, and enlightenment. Ultimately, assessment of this rejuvenation will need to await the next COMMENTARY symposium on Jewish belief.

DAVID M. GORDIS *is president of Hebrew College in Boston and director of the Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies.*

Arthur Green

THE FIRST question is all wrong, even offensive. Its formulation is classically Christian rather than Jewish (beginning with the Credo), and not in the nicest sense. There is even a whiff about it of the religious/political Right. "Do you believe in God?" Are you a good American? Have you ever belonged to an atheist organization? Phooey.

Religious thought has moved significantly in the past two generations under the influences of both existentialism and mysticism. The proper question is, "Do you consider yourself a religious person? How do you express that religiosity? What is the relationship between your own spiritual life and the symbols of Judaism? In what sense do you use the word 'God' or its Hebrew equivalent in your religious life?"

Now which questions shall I answer, yours or mine? Essentially I am a Jewish monist. I encounter life as a single reality. When seen from the viewpoint of unity, that whole of being is called Y-H-W-H (or that old pagan-rooted and misleading word "God," if you must). When seen from the standpoint of our fragmented daily existence it is called *HaWaYaH*, meaning "existence." I do not know a Fellow or a Force "out there," beyond the world in some quasi-spatial sense, Who creates, reveals, redeems. But I do believe there is a deep consciousness that underlies existence, that each human mind is a part of the universal Mind, and that the Whole is sometimes accessible ("revealed") to its parts. The One of which I speak is transcendent, in that it is infinitely elusive and mysterious, while yet being deeply immanent, present throughout the world to those whose eyes are open.

In ways I do not claim to understand, Universal Mind is also Universal Heart; we reach inward toward it by emotional openness as well as by contemplative detachment. Awareness of this underlying and all-pervasive oneness of being leads me to feelings of awe and wonder, to a desire to be present to it always. In an act of faith that does not seem far-fetched, I assert that the One also seeks to be known and recognized by the many; "my" longing is a reflection of "its" longing, as "my" mind is a fragment of "its" Mind. It thus causes the impulse within us to need religious expression and to create forms through which we will attain deeper knowledge and awareness of the One. In that sense you may say that the essential forms of our religion are "revealed": they are our human creative response to the divine presence that makes itself known within us.

I believe that the most essential message of Judaism is that each of us is created in the image of God. We exist for the purpose of teaching that message. The ten utterances ("Let there be . . .") in Genesis 1, leading up to the creation of humans, affirm that this principle exists within nature. In their imperative form, these self-expressions of the One reveal themselves as ten commandments, the binding power of which I fully affirm.

As a tradition-embracing Jew, I hear the voice of my Beloved (yes, there is room for eros in monism!) calling to me from within many of the commandments, customs, and teachings of the Jewish people. That same Beloved, of course, also calls to me from treetops, from within great music, and from "behind the lattice-work" of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Song of Songs. My response is inadequate, partial, fragmentary, "merely" human.

I am not a literal affirmer of Jewish chosenness. It is we who proclaimed ourselves chosen, not God. If by "chosen" you mean *vocation*, however, I do believe that the Jewish people has a specific mission, as indicated above. We have a unique relationship with the One, based on our key experience/idea of the human as God's image. Our distinctive role, today as always, is to teach that message, chiefly by example. Therefore such matters as how prisoners are treated in Israeli jails, how the rights of the Arab minority are handled in Israel, and how our community reacts to incidents of wife-beating in our midst go to the very heart of Jewish existence and meaning. These are not "liberal" values taken from some extraneous source, but rather testing-grounds for our fulfillment of our deepest and most essentially Jewish purpose.

Messianism means retaining our vision of a world redeemed, a world in which every person and each people will experience liberation as we did when we came out of Egypt. Surely our unique liberation was meant to be paradigmatic: it includes the journey from the sea, where we rejoiced, to the mountain, where we accepted the rules needed for responsible community. We should be helping others along this same dual path; liberation and commitment are our model. Fortunately our other commitment to each human being as God's image did not allow us to rejoice as our enemy drowned; we are committed to liberation, but we can never celebrate violence. Human life is too holy.

The Holocaust has been a shaping event mostly in a negative way. Its terrible shadow forced Jewish theology to become a vehicle of survival, of self-justification, of endless rounds in the losing fight with theodicy. But the scars are just now beginning to heal and we are starting to move forward. We must never forget, but we must allow for that healing.

Israel: I am a committed but mostly nontheological Zionist. The renewal/liberation of our people, including its language and culture, that has taken place under the Zionist banner, is one I fully support and in which I participate. Though I might have supported binationalism in the 30's, today I fully affirm the need for a Jewish state; I visit Israel frequently and love it deeply. I even have to admit that I feel something of prophecy fulfilled when I see the tribes returned and the desert blooming. Still, something chokes in me each time I hear the phrase, "the beginning of our redemption." Such claims are dangerous.

America: it may be no accident that we Jews find ourselves in the most pious, God-seeking country of the Western world. That is the best news about America. The worst? Superficiality, commercialism, and all the rest. Too much wealth is not very good for us, either. We are choking on our success. A special concern is that America is so race-driven that it cannot recognize ethnic diversity among Caucasians. We want to survive in America as a distinctive cultural-ethnic-religious minority group, most of whose members happen to have white skin. Is there room for such a group in a future United States?

I am a committed anti-denominationalist in Jewish life. It is my hope that all the denominational divisions outside Orthodoxy will soon disappear, since they very poorly reflect most Jews. Many rabbis agree with this view; the great enemy of progress in this direction is denominational control of placement lists and pension plans.

I am very concerned about the Orthodox/heterodox rift and I think all sides should make greater efforts to avoid it. Neither can compromise basic principles, however, and for liberals these include the legitimacy of our rabbinate and gender equality. I believe that the acceptance of patrilineal descent by Reform was a mistake, mainly because it lessens the need for conversion and thus misses an educational opportunity.

As for the prospects of a revival, how large is "large"? See Deuteronomy 7:7 ("It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that the Lord . . . chose you"). I see our numbers diminishing, branches falling off the family tree. I am as distressed about this as is any committed Jew. But (since the days of Moses) we do not consider it a *mitzvah* to count Jews. On the contrary, I think it is more or less forbidden, and I hereby send all our demographers to the *mikveh* (ritual bath) to atone for violating that transgression.

Besides, we Jews have better things to do. We have to help fix a broken world. We have *mitzvot* to do, including especially those of relieving the suffering and injustice that keep so many of our fellow humans from seeing the image of God in themselves and others. We should be so busy with this work that we have no time to count Jews and worry about our survival.

We should also be building a Jewish spiritual life that will work for this new era of Jewish history. Wasn't Moses told somewhere in the mid-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dle of those chapters in Exodus on the Tabernacle, "If you build it, they will come"?

ARTHUR GREEN *is Philip W. Lown professor of Jewish thought at Brandeis University.*

Blu Greenberg

YES, I BELIEVE in God. I must add all the caveats: with many questions, with moments of great doubt, with moments even of anger. But yes, I believe in God. For the gift of the Sabbath alone, I believe in God; and for nature; and for daily miracles; and for beautiful music, though I well know that it was God's covenantal partner who paired the notes and created the rhythm. Not every stirring of the heart connects me to God, but some do: the case-study method of theology.

Revelation? Yes. God revealed the Torah to the Jewish people at Sinai and then struck a covenant with them again in the plains of Moab. Some part of my DNA was also there at Sinai, in the crowd. Reading the weekly portion of the Torah, week after week, year after year, I never cease to be amazed at this treasure. And yet I have learned much from critical scholarship, which does not shatter my religious belief or compromise my love of traditional commentary; rather, it has opened up tremendous new insights, enabling me to see more graphically that which the tradition itself suggests—that the word of God is multivalent and multivocal, and still the word of God.

I accept the binding nature of the commandments, as interpreted by my community, the modern Orthodox. Not only do I feel bound by *halakhah*, but mostly I consider the laws as gifts, without which the quality of my life would be much poorer. I know there is the trap of routine—lack of spontaneity, loss of fervor and meaning—and often I fall into it; but the gains of embracing the whole system far outstrip the losses that could come from having to pick and choose anew each day.

God chose the Jewish people, beginning with the very first encounter with Abraham and Sarah. We are chosen in the sense that God loves us. Otherwise, there is no reason to explain why such a small and dispersed people is still alive today. But we were also chosen to serve as a witness to the world: how to live as an ethical community, a responsible and kind family, a caring neighbor, a believing spirit. This is why we were chosen to receive the Torah in the first place—to live it and to spread its message and its model as widely as possible without giving up our own unique identity. The same role and rules that applied to us at Sinai apply in New York and Melbourne.

The Holocaust has colored my way of looking at events in life, large and small. It is a prism, a consciousness that springs autonomously into action in the most ordinary circumstances—taking a shower, tucking the children into bed at night. I must admit also that reflections on the Holocaust at times take the steam out of my ritual performance and puncture my faith. But then I ask myself who am I, second-generation native American, to raise such questions when two rows ahead of me in synagogue sit survivors, still praying with all those memories in their heads?

On the other hand, Israel has done more to reconfirm my faith and identity and gratitude than I could have ever imagined. In no other issue am I more engaged. Though I am an Orthodox Jewish feminist living in America, when I awake each morning the first thing I look for in the paper is news about Israel. But it is more than the immediate urgencies. Simply to think about the miracles of Israel—I must say it—thrills me. Oh, I have my anxieties about the other stories of '48, about integrating the claims of Palestinians to the land, about world opinion, and most of all, about peace that seems so elusive. But I also celebrate the cosmic significance of Israel at the very core of my being.

Living in America, an open society, with every choice to be made; the opportunity to live openly as a Jew without repression or anti-Semitism, to feel freedom and acceptance so profoundly that you take it for granted—this has made it easier to be a Jew.

But it has also made it harder, for the forces that impelled Jewish identity in the past no longer operate. The underbelly of an open society is an attitude of "Why bother?" Without the tools—knowledge, ties to community, some formal religious expression—it becomes very difficult to hold on. Still, as long as someone retains the name Jew, there is a chance that the spark

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

will ignite, if not in this generation then in the next or the next. Given the ubiquity of freedom, I find baffling the inhospitable response by some in my community to (a) converts who voluntarily take on the title of Jew, and (b) Jews who live their lives in less than the full embrace of *halakhah*. Every last Jew should be treasured, even more so in an open society.

Which brings me to intermarriage, our biggest challenge. I have changed my mind about this subject, and then changed it again. I grew up in a community that observed mourning rituals for children who "married out." But, from the perspective of sheer numbers alone, that response no longer works. I personally count several intermarried couples among my friends, though twenty years ago I would not have imagined such a possibility.

Still, even with this knowledge and these friendships, I can say that intermarriage—that is, without conversion of the non-Jewish partner to Judaism—is the direst threat to our continuity and survival. The statistical chance that children of an intermarriage will identify themselves as Jews in adulthood is very poor—less than 20 percent. Essentially, this means that a Jew marrying out has chosen to cut the line, all intentions to the contrary notwithstanding. Given what it has taken to maintain the chain these many generations, given our small size, given what a great gift we carry—this is a tragic squandering of a priceless heritage.

Jewish unity? As my husband, Irving Greenberg, has written, we are heading for a split into two peoples unless we reverse the trends of delegitimation, exclusion, and mean-spiritedness among ourselves. There is no reason in the world—other than the wrong perception as to how much we really need each other—why workable compromises cannot be sought and found. That is not to say that we will all live alike in our Jewishness; or that we will cease to have serious ideological differences and even tough arguments. But we ought to find underlying common denominators that will enable us to live together, and the ground rules for argument must be civility, respect, and genuine listening.

Five factors have already contributed to a significant revival of Judaism in our time: the magnetism of the state of Israel; the expansion of Jewish day schools, including non-Orthodox ones; the new work in "outreach" to the non-affiliated; the Jewish education of lay leadership; and feminism.

Feminism has had an extraordinary impact on Jewish life—in women's lay and religious leadership, in the rooting-out of hierarchy and injustice in a highly ethical religion, and in the exhilarating freshness of women's rituals and spirituality. Men have shared in and been carried along on this crest of celebration. But perhaps the most significant development of all has been in the area of learning.

A virtual explosion of women's learning is taking place today. I speak not only of Talmud study or the creation of women's institutions of higher learning (like Drisha) in the Orthodox community. The phenomenon is occurring across the board, in Sisterhoods and Jewish Community Centers, in Federations, and at a vast variety of summer-learning institutes. This is the first time in Jewish history that so much emphasis on learning has come out of the women's community.

Of course, the explosion in Jewish learning is a general one in our day. But without the new sense of empowerment and entitlement that feminism contributed, women would have remained on the sidelines. Having now been pulled into the center of the learning revolution, they inspire the whole community by their example. Learning generates more learning, and insofar as Jewish knowledge offers a key to Jewish continuity, the reality of a much larger universe of learning Jews may yet powerfully affect the prospects of a truly large-scale Jewish revival in America.

BLU GREENBERG *is an author and lecturer on feminism and the Jewish family. Her most recent book is* Black Bread: Poems, After the Holocaust *(KTAV).*

Joshua O. Haberman

I AM SOMEWHAT equivocal about positive statements about God, but I am unequivocal in my rejection of the denial of God's existence. A godless cosmos emerging in endless cycles of randomness is the ultimate absurdity. Every fiber of my being negates this species of metaphysical nihilism.

I believe that the One, unique, and incompara-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ble God is the core and source of all being. My God is personal, conscious, and self-revealing. The biblical doctrine of man "made in God's image" implies divine attributes such as intelligence, free will, and moral judgment as models for similar human characteristics, however inferior these may be.

The relationship with God is what the Bible is all about. It is the sum and substance of Judaism. "Relationship" is a vague and slippery term, but it affirms at the very least a connection, bilateral communication, reciprocal caring, and interaction.

I believe that God revealed to us collectively, and to some individually, truths about the universe, and guidance in the form of commandments for the conduct of life.

The sudden emergence of Israel's ethical monotheism, stunningly unprecedented, and unduplicated over one-and-one-half millennia, defies explanation by any theory of history. It is a true mystery, magnified by the moral and spiritual transformation of Israel and its unique survival from antiquity to this day. The eventual spread of the core of Judaism's monotheism through its daughter religions of Christianity and Islam among billions of people turns the mystery of Israel into a miracle. For all these reasons, the supposition of a divine revelation which transformed Israel and, through Israel, is transforming mankind in a painfully slow "education" marked by countless rifts and relapses is not only an article of faith but a rationally persuasive proposition.

The Torah is our foremost document of revelation. We shall never know for sure which of its commandments were directly and explicitly revealed as stated and which are derivative, that is, extensions from revealed principles by way of interpretation.

With the falling away of the conditions which gave rise to them, many commandments tied to specific social, economic, cultural, and religious institutions can no longer be binding. However, the decision on what is and what is no longer binding is a most difficult and hazardous task for our religious leadership. The resulting controversies account for the splitting of Judaism into its various movements today.

My own criterion for accepting any part of the Torah as divinely revealed and binding consists of a threefold test. First, the pragmatic test of experience: the evidence of a commandment's benefit to the individual and society is a sign of its validity. Second, the consensus of Torah scholars, past and present. However, since there are many commandments on which no such consensus exists today, I must apply a third test, as proposed by the theologian Franz Rosenzweig: my personal response to the study and actual observance of the commandment. If its performance leaves me with a sense of having been truly commanded by God to act as prescribed, the commandment is binding, for me. Presently, I observe only certain commandments as binding, but hold myself open to the observance of others when further study and experience lead me to do so.

Deeply and ineradicably embedded in Jewish consciousness and history is the idea of God's covenant with Israel. In a universe in which no two blades of grass are alike, I am not scandalized by the notion that Israel has a distinctive aptitude and role in history. Historical naturalists deny a metaphysically assigned role for Israel and therefore reject the chosen-people doctrine. In their view, the "mission of Israel" represents ideals generated by the nation itself in the course of history. Little do they realize that a people choosing, on its own, a world-saving role—the perfection of mankind—would be the most unnatural phenomenon in the annals of history. The norm for nations is to pursue their own national interest, not the freedom, justice, and peace of all mankind. Because such an ambition totally contradicts the normal behavior of nations, it must have originated in a most uncommon—I should say unnatural—way: an act of God!

I believe in the core idea of the messianic hope: God has programmed human nature so that the good and the just will prevail in the end. Moreover, God has helped us reach this goal through the revelation of Torah, with its blueprint for the guidance of life. Man is naturally neither good nor evil. Evil can be overcome and man can be instructed and trained to live righteously. When all mankind is guided by Torah principles, we shall experience "salvation," that is, achieve the highest possible form of well-being in security and peace.

The Holocaust raises questions about Germans, Jews, and God which we may never be able to answer. We have yet to understand the suddenness with which Germany, Austria, and the millions of West, Central, and East Europeans who collaborated with the Nazis sank from a high level of civilization—or so we thought—into depths of depravity. How could such ad-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vanced technological skill be employed for the savage purpose of mass slaughter?

The Holocaust also lowered my opinion of the quality of our communal leadership and of the political acumen of our people. How could nearly five generations of Jews, from the beginning of the 19th century to the outbreak of World War II, so belittle or altogether disregard the countless warning signals of the approaching catastrophe?

And where was God in all this?

A number of ideas about God and man perished with the six million Jews. In the first place, human reason, which had been put in God's place by the Enlightenment, was toppled from its eminence. Henceforth, psychologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians must concede a bigger role to the irrational and violent proclivities of human nature in shaping the course of history. Theologically, we must part with an unwarranted, childish dependence on God's providence, such as we find in Psalm 121: "The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy shadow upon thy right hand. . . . The Lord shall keep thee from all evil." Such statements are devout hopes but not theological doctrines.

How *does* God help us? Does He ever? God should not be expected to do for us what we are able to do for ourselves. We have been put into a habitat which is ours to control: "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord but the earth has He given to the children of men" (Psalms 115.16). We do not in the least diminish the enormous burden of guilt of Nazi anti-Semites if we admit that a tragically misguided Jewish ostrich policy played into their hands.

My ultimate question with reference to the Holocaust is: could not God have created a perfect world and a human species incapable of doing evil? But we might as well ask the still greater question: why did God bother to create life at all? Why is there anything instead of nothing? Such questions are for God, not us, to answer.

JOSHUA O. HABERMAN *is president of the Washington-based Foundation for Jewish Studies, author of* The God I Believe In: Conversations about Judaism, *and senior rabbi emeritus of the Washington Hebrew Congregation (Reform).*

David Weiss Halivni

THERE ARE three principles which I believe are the foundation upon which the Bible rests, and which constitute our basic, fundamental beliefs. First, humankind is not self-sufficient. If humankind were completely to fulfill itself, through all possible avenues—emotional, intellectual, aesthetic—and if humankind were to find a complete outlet for all these things, it would still crave something more, something beyond, something transcendent. The very nature of human beings, their finite nature, is such that there will always be room for something beyond, and always an urge toward something beyond. That beyond is God.

So there is that being which transcends us. There will always be an abyss beyond which will be God and across which humankind will always try to reach out but never fully succeed. That unresolved, constant desire is what defines humankind, and sets up the relationship between humankind and God.

The second principle which the Bible assumes, and which is shared, minimally, by all religious traditions that subscribe to the Bible, is that the transcendent being we call God broke into human history and made contact with us. In tradition, of course, we call this revelation.

Third, these religious traditions believe that the legacy of that meeting is the Torah. One might, of course, contend that God addressed us but that nothing remained behind from this encounter. The idea of Torah, however, is that God not only spoke to us but left us an inheritance; He left us the Torah.

The belief that there is a God, and that this God broke into human history, and that the Torah is the result of that meeting, is something I believe in, and such belief is essential to anyone who regards the Bible as the source of divine information.

When it comes to the commandments, we are already moving beyond the Bible—into different religious traditions. But if the question is, do I accept the binding nature of the *biblical* commandments, the answer, for me, is yes, those specified as such in Jewish tradition. Commandments in Judaism fall into many different levels, and these different levels have specific, detailed, practical ramifications. I personally find all the *mitzvot*, including those which are called rabbinic, binding. These latter are, of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

course, governed by their own restrictions and regulations; but in accordance with these qualifications I accept them.

Let me say what chosenness is not; it should not carry any racial overtones. According to our sages, there is no people who cannot become Jewish. I reject even the notion that the Jews have the highest kind of spirit which other nations do not have. I accept the *Halakhah* that every person, in that respect, is created in the divine image, and that the door is always open for conversion without distinction or qualification.

Having said this, though, I still believe that nations are sometimes chosen, just as individuals are chosen. One can say, for example, that Shakespeare was chosen to give his work to the world. The Greeks, in a sense, had a certain function, and were chosen. The Jews were chosen in the sphere of religion and morality. These are the areas in which the Jews have contributed to the world at large, and therefore they are chosen, if by chosen we mean that people make a specific contribution which is not shared to the same extent, or equaled, by others.

As to messianism: that is complicated. Of course, the belief in a messiah is cardinal, but these things are not well defined. The life of the world to come is perhaps deliberately left ambiguous in Judaism. One has to believe that death is not the end; but what happens afterward remains unspecified. The sources do not say exactly what the messiah will be. Nevertheless, the idea that mankind will be redeemed is central in Judaism and I therefore accept it.

The Holocaust is the most difficult part for me. It is difficult in many respects, not least of which is that it is linked in COMMENTARY's question with the state of Israel—for me this is a problem.

Religiously, the Holocaust means something contradictory. On the one hand, we can no longer accept the past. Something went deeply, badly wrong, and therefore we cannot continue as though nothing at all had taken place. We should not do exactly what we were doing before. On the other hand, after the war one needs the reassurance of God and of tradition even more. One must still walk humbly with the Lord our God. If this is given up, then no basis is left, no shelter, no support. The Holocaust survivor, therefore, lives in two worlds. The survivor must challenge the past, or else it will seem as though he were approving it; but at the same time, how can we go on without God?

There are those who connect the Holocaust and the state of Israel—as though God somehow compensated us for the children who were gassed. I do not. Nevertheless, those who imbibed the experience of anti-Semitism with their mothers' milk, who were literally frightened by every Gentile, even at a distance, most appreciate what Israel means. Walking upright after so many centuries and generations strengthens the pride and security of Jews, especially survivors. The state of Israel does not exempt us from continuing the tradition of God and the Torah. On the contrary, the Bible specifies Israel as the place in which the Torah is to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the state of Israel adds a religious dimension even to lives of those who are not observant.

Concerning the contemporary American situation I do not speak as an expert; I am not a sociologist. However, what I see is that the same feature of American culture is both the greatest advantage and the greatest danger. That is: the freedom we enjoy here. I do not know if anyone has enjoyed freedom as much as I have. I came to this country with no means and no secular education and, thank God, I have reached the highest level of the university. All this was made possible by American freedom and American opportunity.

At the same time, from my position in the academic world, where the rate of assimilation is so high, I can see the peril of this freedom. I have enough trust in the eternity of Israel that I do not fear the worst, and I do not think that hope comes only from the more right-wing sectors of Judaism. Yet even with this almost mystical trust, the situation with regard to assimilation sometimes scares me.

Within American Judaism, I am convinced that the Right is moving farther to the Right and the Left farther to the Left. Religious extremity itself does not offend me. It is the lack of tolerance, the lack of love for the other group which offends me. Tolerance and love for those who differ are essential. How do we achieve unity? We must live it. We must have more people who embody tolerance and love as personal examples. Even the most scrupulous observance does not preclude this.

Do I see any prospect of a large-scale revival? I would be glad if we were to hold our own. We have seen that predictions are suspect. Before World War II, it was said that there would be no Orthodoxy in America. Then there was a rebirth. Now sociologists tell us that we are past our zenith in this country. So I do not know, but I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conclude with the prayer that America will remain America with all its freedoms and that the Jewish people will take advantage of this freedom to preserve their relationship with Torah.

David Weiss Halivni *is Lucius N. Littauer professor of classical Jewish civilization at Columbia University and rector of the Institute of Traditional Judaism. His memoirs,* The Book and the Sword: A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction, *will be published this fall by Farrar, Straus & Giroux.*

Susannah Heschel

I was raised in a profoundly spiritual home and I will always be deeply grateful to my parents for giving me the sensitivities to perceive the divine presence and for teaching me how to pray. Visiting the hasidic relatives of my father, Abraham Joshua Heschel—many of them had managed to escape from Europe and move to New York—became for me childhood experiences of holiness. I will never forget how moved I felt in the presence of my uncle, the Kapitshinitzer *rebbe*. His gentleness and sensitivity impressed me deeply and gave me the sense that the holy is linked to the vulnerable. There was a religious dimension to life that I was privileged to experience as a small child, and it made a lasting impression.

At the same time I was frustrated and annoyed from my earliest childhood days by the senseless rules that relegated me, with the other females, to the kitchen, preparing the food, while the *rebbe* sat at his table, teaching and singing with his Hasidim. I could not accept that and I complained about it, from the time I was five years old. I did not want to overthrow anything, I just wanted to be part of the experience. Essentially, I saw two kinds of Hasidism: a vibrant spiritual and intellectual life for men, and a life on the margins for women. I did not want a life in the kitchen or behind the partition in the synagogue excluded from the study, singing, dancing, prayer, and contemplation that make Hasidism so vibrant.

Did God reveal all the commandments, even those unfair to women? I do believe there have been events of divine revelation, and that my soul was present at Sinai, but I also realize the crucial distinction between the word of God and the word of men. I have always firmly believed that God would never forbid me to be counted in a *minyan*, a prayer quorum, or to lead the prayers, but rather that such prohibitions express the will of some human beings. What we have may be the Judaism of men; we need the Judaism of God.

For many feminists, classical Jewish teachings about God are onerous. The overwhelmingly male imagery of God is intrinsically tied to notions of divine transcendence and omnipotence, they argue, and overcoming patriarchy means a radical alteration of Jewish theology. While such objections may be valid, I do not find divine transcendence and omnipotence the most salient features of most classical Jewish theology. On the contrary, rabbinic and medieval texts more often present God as engaging in empathic resonance to human suffering than as an omnipotent ruler of the universe. Expressions of God's inner emotional life abound, reinforcing precisely the sort of theological expressions encouraged by feminism.

It is a moral outrage that until the modern era only men have had the opportunity to express their religious views and experiences. Just because those views are male-authored, however, does not mean women cannot appropriate them. The great tragedy is that the vital centers of Jewish religious and intellectual life in Europe were wiped out, making the struggle to recover our spiritual heritage even more difficult.

Ironically, modernity and secularism, anathema to religious men, have opened new religious possibilities for Jewish women. For the first time in Jewish history large numbers of women are able to study classical texts, from yeshiva-style learning of Talmud to university-based historical analyses of Judaism. Women are writing interpretations of Jewish law, commentaries on the Bible, new midrashim, and perhaps one day women, too, will write sacred hasidic literature.

The wish for full inclusion in Jewish religious life has remained with me to this day. I seem to have been born a feminist, with a strong sense of justice, and I was also raised with a love of the spiritual dimension, with a longing for moments of holiness. I feel I am a Jew without a home. Within many segments of modern Orthodoxy, *halakhah*, religious law, seems to have taken on the attributes once assigned to God: omni-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

science, omnipotence, and immutability. The rigidity of *halakhah*—"remove one brick and the entire edifice will collapse"—is a peculiarly modern Orthodox attitude. The dilemma is that while Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform Judaism have made many wonderful, thoughtful decisions equalizing the status of women and men, I feel in them an absence of the intense prayer and devotion that fill the little hasidic *shtiebl*, or prayer house.

Chosenness strikes me as a very modern formulation; it is barely an issue in classical Jewish texts. When I was growing up, being Jewish was always associated with generosity and devotion to others, and a *mitzvah* meant doing something for another human being, or for God. My father used to say that a *mitzvah* is a prayer in the form of a deed. I also learned from him that religious life and social justice were intertwined. The great concerns of the prophets and the rabbis were not the minutiae of *halakhah*, or the refinement of personal piety, but the treatment of widows and orphans, cheating in the marketplace, and atrocities committed during war.

Even as messianism means the ultimate conquest of evil, it also means conquering evils one by one in the here and now. To speak out against human-rights violations is itself a religious act, and I understand why my father, upon returning in the mid-1960's from the civil-rights march in Selma, Alabama, said, "I felt my legs were praying."

While I understand the loss of faith some Jews feel as a consequence of the Holocaust, it seems to me misdirected, reminding me of parents who divorce after the death of a child. Neither parent is responsible for the child's death, yet the horror is so great that the relationship becomes untenable. When Germans murder members of our own family of Jews, it is not clear that the logical response is to divorce God. A better question might be how to retain confidence in the humanity of our fellow human beings.

The political and cultural gains achieved by the establishment of the state of Israel are extraordinary, and the intellectual vibrancy of the country makes being Jewish more fascinating than it has ever been. The complexities of relating Jewish identity to Israeli identity demand a more differentiated understanding of Judaism. Why is it that only in Israel I could not find a *minyan* in which to say kaddish for my father? The Orthodox synagogues would not tolerate me as a woman, while the Reform and Conservative congregations were too weak in members to hold daily services.

On a spiritual level, Israel offers extraordinary possibilities; I feel parts of my soul come alive only when I am in Jerusalem. While my commitment to the state is absolute, my politics are with those Israelis who strenuously object to the occupation and subjugation of Palestinian populations and land, and are appalled that torture of prisoners is committed in the name of the state.

American Jews today seem to be thirsting for authentic Judaism, but unsure where to turn. For me as a woman, the gains achieved during the past 30 years have been remarkable, but it will take some time to bring together the moral justice of feminism with the fragile remnants of Judaism's spiritual traditions.

SUSANNAH HESCHEL *holds the Abba Hillel Silver chair in Jewish studies at Case Western Reserve University. She is the author of a forthcoming monograph on Abraham Geiger, and is the editor of* On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader, *and of* Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays by Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Milton Himmelfarb

DO I BELIEVE in God? "I accept the universe," Margaret Fuller said. Poor woman, the universe did not long accept her. I accept God. I hope He accepts me.

Is the Torah divine revelation? Without maintaining the photographic accuracy of Exodus 19-20 and Deuteronomy 4-5, I believe that a law was revealed—a numinous word—to our ancestors and transmitted to us.

Gershom Scholem, the great scholar of Jewish mysticism, believed in God but not in *kashrut*, unable to imagine Him closely involved with the kitchen. Scholem knew, of course, that the rabbis had warned against trying to calculate the relative weights of the *mitzvot*: what seems to be a minor one, sparing a mother bird when taking her young (Deuteronomy 22:6f.), entails the same reward of long life as the Decalogues' *mitzvah* of honoring father and mother (Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16). But that was homily, not law. The law the rabbis decreed is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that *mitzvot* do differ in weight. For only three of the 613 must a Jew allow himself to be killed rather than be compelled to transgress (the prohibitions of bloodshed, unchastity, and idolatry).

Aristotle on the care needed in changing laws (Politics 1269a) is still useful: ". . . it is proper for some laws sometimes to be altered. But . . . it . . . needs . . . much caution. . . . Are all the laws to be open to alteration . . .?"

Scholem must have overlooked this caution about slippery slopes. Not even so profound an expositor of Jewish antinomianism is likely to have envisioned rabbis adding the bedroom to the kitchen as one more area beyond God's purview.

When the Reform rabbis were considering whether to ordain homosexuals, a professor at their seminary, Hebrew Union College, reminded them that Leviticus 18—the Jewish tradition's choice, over 186 other chapters in the Pentateuch, as the reading for Yom Kippur afternoon—calls homosexual acts an abomination. A member of the majority easily disposed of the objection: "It's pretty late in the day for Scripture to be invoked in CCAR [Central Conference of American Rabbis] debates." First the Talmud went and then Scripture itself; and within Scripture first kosher and *treyf* flesh, fish, and fowl and then kosher and *treyf* sexual relationships.

Nor is the end in sight. New victims of discrimination will emerge and assert their right to equality. For instance: isn't prejudice against the pedophilic, necrophilic, and the incestuous religious in origin, and isn't discrimination rooted in religious prejudice unconstitutional? Over religious prejudice, rights will win every time.

"How odd/Of God/To choose/The Jews." According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* it was the obscure William Norman Ewer (1885-1976) who wrote this celebrated quatrain. Lou H. Silberman, in his instructive entry on "Chosen People" (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5, coll. 498-502), attributes it to Hilaire Belloc, author of the anti-Semitic *The Jews* (1922). To Jacques Maritain as to other Christian theologians, Protestant as well as Catholic, the Election of Israel is not an oddity but a Mystery.

Silberman ends his "Chosen People" with this: "Modern Jewish thought is still grappling with the problem . . . in a way that does justice both to the universalist values of Judaism . . . and to the specific character of Jewish historical and spiritual experience. . . ." For modern Jews the very notion of Jewish chosenness can be troubling—elitist, ethnocentric. Maybe we would feel more comfortable if, instead of talking about Election and Mystery, we talked about less lofty extraordinariness.

A science-fiction fantasy: when the alien scouts return in their UFO to their home planet, they report the many odd things they have observed on Earth. One of the oddest is the disproportion between how conspicuous certain humans called Jews are and how few they are—fewer than 25 in 10,000. Odder yet is that the 99.75+ percent are called Gentiles because they are not the .25- percent who are Jews.

What is our distinctive mission today? As always, to remain in being as Jews. Our other missions are additional.

Messianism? We must continue to pray for the messiah's coming, and when he comes we must examine his credentials. In the past we suffered repeatedly from false messiahs. More recently we have been burned by false messianisms.

The Holocaust and Israel are in their opposite ways part of the Jewish disproportionateness and extraordinariness—the larger-than-lifeness—through which I feel Jewish chosenness. At *yizkor* time, when memorial prayers are recited for the dead, I mourn those murdered in the Holocaust; in my thanksgiving for bread and on the Sabbath I pray for Israel.

Will American culture and society be good or bad for the Jews?

Jewish self-hate—Jewish anti-Semitism—is less virulent than it was, in part because Gentile anti-Semitism is less virulent. This means that the psychological and social cost of being a Jew and the temptation of abandoning the Jewish religion and community have shrunk. At the same time, so has the tempting attractiveness of the Gentile world.

In the 30's, many of the philosopher Sidney Hook's Jewish students told him that if they had had a choice, they would have been born Episcopalian. Also in the 30's Margaret Mitchell—the literary critic, not the novelist—said to Elliot Cohen, who was to be COMMENTARY's first editor, "The trouble with you Jews is that you think you would be happy if only you were Aryan. You have this illusion of Aryan happiness." Such things would not be said now.

On the other hand, a kind of Gresham's law can operate in culture as in finance. It isn't easy for a demanding, disciplined culture to compete with the loose, indulgent culture that prevails in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

America (and the rest of the Western world, not excepting Tel Aviv).

Much that is done and said in the name of Jewish religion, here as in Israel, is in effect anti-Judaic. Still, indifference and outright hostility worry me more. In some circles where Jews are no strangers, "religion" is a dirty word.

As to the possibility of a large-scale revival, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" More probably, there will be—to echo Ninotchka's sinister justification of Stalin's purges in the eponymous film, "Therrre will be fewerrr but betterrr Rrrussians"—fewer but better Jews. On the demographic side, they will intermarry less than we do now and may procreate more.

"*Hatikvah*," the Zionist and Israeli anthem, proclaims, "Our hope is not lost." That is in answer to the contemporaries of Ezekiel (37:11), who, more than 2,500 years ago, had despaired, crying, ". . . our hope is lost. . . ."

Hope is a Jewish virtue.

MILTON HIMMELFARB *is the author of* The Jews of Modernity.

Lawrence A. Hoffman

WE SUFFER less from lack of belief than from inadequate language to express it. How can we believe what we do not even know how to say? Conversations about belief often make honest people feel guilty for doubting what they think everyone else knows for sure. We can confirm or deny belief in "God," "revelation," and so forth only by asking first what these might mean rephrased for modern ears.

Consider the *Sh'ma* and its blessings, the daily liturgical staple that affirms our faith in one sole God Who (a) creates all things, (b) reveals Torah to Israel, and (c) promises redemption. What modern metaphors capture best this threefold insistence on creation, revelation, and redemption?

My metaphor combines time, space, and history. What astounds about the universe is the aesthetic and scientific miracle by which the finely tuned network of natural law accords so beautifully with mathematics. For modern Jews, the doctrine of creation is the affirmation that the universe has design. Revelation describes our faith that purpose has a place within this cosmic order: in touch with ultimate wisdom, we humans can matter in a grand scheme of which we know almost nothing but into which we have been thrust. Redemption is the realization that, over the long run, purpose within pattern gives us the right to hope. Pattern, purpose, and hope are the contemporary equivalents of creation, revelation, and redemption. They sustain us on the tiny bridge of time called history.

If the age of just the earth (never mind the universe, which is four times older) were a line in space equal to the distance from New York to Los Angeles, Jewish history since Abraham and Sarah would cover only a few feet, and human existence, prehistory and all, would encompass only part of a single span of the Golden Gate or the George Washington bridge. The Holocaust, therefore, in all its unspeakable horror, is insufficient to shatter optimism. It is, as it were, a blip on the screen of cosmic time. The state of Israel is a similar, albeit positive, tiny step in time, an outpost of hope we must defend, but hardly a sudden sign of imminent messianic victory, as some extremists imagine. Life is always lived in the narrowness of bridge spans. Faith is the insistence that the bridge goes somewhere, connecting past and future in a present that has meaning.

For the bridge is not without direction. Creation pulses toward ever-increasing freedom. If God is the power behind universal pattern, the guarantor of purpose, and the ground for hope, we can say, in short, that God wants human freedom; has designed a universe that invites it; and summons Jews to champion it. The Jewish people's moral purpose is to tell our story of servitude and freedom, to act it out in ritual that revives our vision and steels our nerve, and then to demonstrate in all we do our faith in freedom as the redemptive end of history.

Beyond the moral opposition of freedom and enslavement, Judaism codes the world also as *kodesh* or *hol*, the holy or the everyday. We move from slavery to freedom; but back and forth between *kodesh* and *hol*. Torah is a clarion call for freedom and a blueprint for meaningful human life in the holy and the everyday.

"Holy" (or "sacred") likewise requires modern translation. It means nonutilitarian—like Hanukkah candles which our liturgy says "are holy; we have no right to use them." Sacred relationships are those where people do not use each

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other. God is uniquely holy (beyond manipulation). We have holy times and places, too: like the Sabbath, when we do no utilitarian work, or the *kotel* (the Western Wall), where we stop to pray but from which we derive no secular gain.

We humans have access to only that single quadrant of the space/time continuum which we call our present. We cannot see it "all at once"—a metaphor combining space ("all") and time ("at once"). The Jewish map is thus an ellipse, revolving equally about two centers: Israel and the Diaspora. Diaspora Jewry sanctifies time; Jews in Israel sanctify space. We need them both. I am a religious Zionist in that I strive for redemption in our land (space), but also in history (time).

Given my faith in freedom, I am not dismayed by (as the editors put it) "movements of personal and sexual liberation." I even understand (though I do not welcome) "assimilating or otherwise falling away." Increased options are the price of freedom, which (as I say) "God wants," and so should we.

I decry the reactionary call to reign in freedom, and the provocative rhetoric that pits the "good Jewish guys" against the bad. Endemic moral chaos and increasingly marginal Jewish identity derive less from the suspension of limits by those in authority than from our society's widespread suspicion that life is meaningless. Here, I do indeed see the prospect of large-scale Jewish revival (COMMENTARY's word, not mine; I do not think we are dead), since Judaism is uniquely outfitted to provide demonstrations of human meaning, for ours is a story that celebrates freedom, while affirming pattern, purpose, and hope.

Here is the challenge: to overcome old habits that ground Jewish survival in fear of anti-Semitism and memories of European ethnicity. A century ago we needed Jewish hospitals, colleges, clubs, and centers—for Jews were not welcome in the mainstream. Now we need local communities of the sacred, where people come to mark life's passages and discover the Jewish way of making sense of the world. We have been conditioned by a "foreign-affairs" agenda—saving Jewish lives abroad and founding a Jewish state, for which we successfully galvanized the combined power, wealth, and corporate wisdom of national organizations. The struggle to save ourselves is a different challenge, requiring small-scale communal care suffused with religious vision. What Federations were to the world we are leaving, synagogues must become for the world we are building. But they will have to transform themselves from old-time ethnic addresses to spiritual oases, sacred centers where the realities of pattern, purpose, and hope are beyond doubt.

Jews by choice are a particular source of promise for us. A post-ethnic Judaism requires no particular old-country memories. It overcomes loneliness and fragmentation with life led daily in committed and caring community. Here is a spiritual invitation worth opting for, especially in an age of uncertainty where people seek out meaning. But meaning is a lifelong search, and so, finally, revival requires that we outgrow our obsession with childhood education at the expense of attending to Judaism's adult message. Judaism should be recast as intellectually satisfying and emotionally enriching to the most discerning adults among us, for a religion worth affirming cannot be for children only.

I welcome denominationalism as an increase in Jewish options, but I fear triumphalism and closed-mindedness. There is no single standard of Jewish authenticity. As I respect other Jewish choices that I cannot personally espouse, I expect others to esteem as equally profound my own determination to be a Reform Jew. I too am engaged in the age-old task of Jewish survival and the ever-new hope that I may help those I meet on the bridge of time that is my life.

LAWRENCE A. HOFFMAN *is a rabbi and professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union College (Reform) in New York. He is the author or editor of eleven books, including, most recently,* Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism, *and a complete revision of Morris N. Kertzer's classic introduction to Judaism,* What Is a Jew?

Francine Klagsbrun

I LIVE THE life of a believing Jew, but always with the awareness that my belief is shadowed by doubt. On the most primitive level, I plead and bargain with the God I'm not sure exists when I or people dear to me face illness or trouble. I rage at that God when I confront suffering and injustice, but also thank God for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good that comes my way. When I watch the days lengthen in springtime or consider the myriad forms of life on earth it seems inconceivable to me that there is not a Supreme Being Who gives order and direction to our universe. When I contemplate the random cruelties and horrors the world holds it seems inconceivable that there is.

I live with the tension of both believing and not believing, recognizing that I will probably never resolve it. I grew up at a time when Jews rarely spoke about God, and theology, it was said, was not a Jewish pursuit. That has changed now, and God-talk is everywhere. Much of that talk seems to me New Age "spirituality" translated into Jewish life. But not all. I envy those people whose souls are truly in love with God, and I admire those engaged in serious explorations into the nature of divinity.

Still, I am more comfortable performing *mitzvot*, the deeds and commandments of the tradition, than analyzing their origins, and most comfortable studying our sacred texts. But how perform and why study without perfect faith? The traditional answer is that from the doing will come the believing. Mine is that—aside from the moral laws in the Torah—I try to keep those practices that have most defined the Jews as a people through the ages. These include the Sabbath and dietary rules, the festivals and life-event rituals. Jews have lived by these laws and customs for thousands of years, and too often died for them. How dare I ignore them?

As for the texts, they are the lifeblood of our tradition. What happened at Sinai is a mystery I cannot fathom, but something did happen to assure the people of Israel that divine purpose informed every aspect of their existence. The Torah may have had several authors over time, but at its core it remains inspired by a people's conviction of their encounter with God.

That conviction forms the base of the belief in Jewish chosenness. I accept that belief in the sense of the uniqueness and influence of Jews and Judaism. And here again is mystery. Jewish survival in the face of exile, persecutions, and genocide is an astonishment. The Jewish impact on civilization is mind-boggling: monotheism and the Hebrew Bible are only the most obvious Jewish contributions to world culture. The dark side of chosenness, of course, has been the unparalleled suffering Jews as a group have endured. But the ability to affirm and reaffirm their religion despite that suffering is another testament to Jewish singularity.

Traditionally the doctrine of chosenness has included the responsibility of Jews both to follow the teachings of the Torah and to bring those teachings to the world. That responsibility continues. By dint of their history, Jews bear witness to the basest impulses of humanity. Their role includes combating those impulses by calling attention to evil and suffering wherever they occur.

The message of Jewish messianism is a universal one: peace and harmony among all humankind under the dominion of one God. That the message has been corrupted by the periodic acceptance of false messiahs and messianic expectations does not diminish the ideal. It is an ideal of striving toward human perfection. By living according to the ethical precepts of their religion, I still believe that Jews can show the way.

Underlying all my religious views is a passionate belief in the Jewish people. That belief is so deeply part of my persona that neither the Holocaust nor the state of Israel has substantially influenced it. Their impact was different: the Holocaust fills me with fury at and distrust of the nations of the world, and with the certainty that Jews must control their own destiny. Israel offers that control, and for Israel I have unconditional love. Even when I disagree with its policies (which I frequently do), love remains. Theologically, I am of the school that regards humans, not God, as responsible for the Holocaust. Yet my doubting self cannot abide the idea of a God Who could allow such unmitigated evil in the universe. Humans are responsible for Israel also, yet my believing self regards that country as a miracle, ever ongoing.

America is a miracle of another sort. The unprecedented freedom and security Jews enjoy here and the ease with which they fit into American society have made them more confident than ever in openly expressing Jewish beliefs. One indication of Jewish confidence is the growth of day schools among all denominations: the numbers have tripled in the past 30 years.

Paradoxically, the openness of American society also poses the most serious threat to Jewish continuity. Whereas in the past intermarriage often signified rejection of one's Jewish heritage, today it is a reflection of possibilities. It is possible to grow up in a Jewishly-committed home and marry out simply because Jews interact comfortably with non-Jews at every social level. It is possible for a Jew to disappear into the larger so-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ciety, not out of malice toward Judaism, but because that society is so receptive to Jews.

A different aspect of American society has unexpectedly and profoundly stimulated Jewish belief, and that is the women's movement. In itself that movement was originally thoroughly secular, but the Jewish feminism that grew from it was built by religiously knowledgeable women, and has focused to a great extent on religious practice. Women serve as rabbis and cantors and participate as never before in Jewish ritual and prayer. They have taken up serious study of the Torah and are creating their own commentaries on it. Jewish feminists are challenging traditional male images of God and questioning the language of liturgy. Though many of these new religious roles have caused controversy, they have also invigorated Judaism in America.

Disagreements about the religious roles of women are one source of division in American Judaism. At their root, as at the root of many other divisions, is opposition between the Orthodox movement on the one hand and the Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist movements on the other. The last three have differing ideologies, yet, among them, none labels the other inauthentic. Large segments of the Orthodox leadership—although not all—do so regard the other groups. As a result, there is little common ground for religious unity, and centrist Orthodox rabbis who do seek commonality with other denominations are often themselves derided by the more extreme.

I find this situation horrendous. Unity has never been the hallmark of the Jewish people, but a kind of disunity that attempts to delegitimate genuine religious commitment bodes ill for the future. I doubt we will ever have Jewish religious unity, but we must find a way to live together more respectfully in our disunity.

For all the difficulties of American Judaism, however, I cannot join the doomsayers. I do not expect a large-scale return to Judaism in America, but a deepening one. Women's increasing involvement in study, prayer, and ritual is a powerful force for renewal. What they learn and feel about Judaism they will pass on to the next generation. In addition, the growing numbers of young people enrolled in day schools and college-level Jewish-study programs will comprise a nucleus of educated, caring Jews. Beyond that, who knows what other new, unexpected forms of Jewish expression will appear on the scene? We have not survived and influenced others because of our numbers but because of what we have had to say. So we will continue.

FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN, *a columnist for* Moment *magazine and the* Jewish Week, *has written numerous books and articles on social and religious issues. Her new book,* Jewish Days *(Farrar, Straus & Giroux), will be published in the fall.*

David Klinghoffer

THOUGH WE envision idolatry, the practice called in the Talmud *avodah zarah*, as a matter of praying to stone or wood, it can be accomplished without them. As the experience of American Jewry shows, we can just as easily fashion new gods from ideas and emotions, and a logic inherent in Judaism helps us do it. A logic to idolatry? Yes, for the holy texts of our faith present us with certain non-negotiable choices.

Having selected the people Israel to serve the world as a model of commitment to Him, God issued His instructions to us in a document: the Torah. Now either we accept, contrary to what Bible "critics" claim, that in the Sinai wilderness God gave the Pentateuch to Moses in its familiar form—or we do not. If not, that leaves two possibilities: (a) no God has issued any directive to the Jews; or (b) if He did, then over thousands of years, through fiddling around by scribes and "redactors," the precise content of the revelation has become uncertain. If (a), then obviously we have no business worshiping the God of Moses or calling ourselves a "chosen people." If (b), then God is not the deity who has been advertised to us from childhood: the Almighty Lord of the Universe. What kind of Almighty is incapable of keeping His revelation intact—of staying, as reporters say of politicians, "on message"—for a mere few millennia?

In a single Being we should not expect to find omnipotence and incompetence. No Torah, no God.

Furthermore, anyone who accepts that the exact text of the Torah was revealed to Moses has no coherent option but to accept the complementary oral Torah, also transmitted by God and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

later recorded in the Talmud and other rabbinic literature. Highly enigmatic, the Pentateuch is filled with concepts whose meaning is not apparent from context. In the Pentateuch, God will, for example, instruct the Jews to observe the Sabbath, without saying what that entails. He will state that cows and sheep are to be slaughtered for food "as I have commanded you," without mentioning the method.

Are we to believe that the Israelites received no explanation of such matters? Various incoherent answers have been proposed, but only two coherent ones: (a) that the Five Books of Moses were forged by humans to justify the practices of an already existing theocratic regime, and thus no explanation was needed; or (b) that the written Torah was revealed along with an oral companion. Again, answer (a) is incompatible with the Almighty Lord as posited even by Reform clergymen. Such a God would not have to rely on a massive hoax to communicate His will. Answer (b) was the belief of the Jewish people from ancient times.

The conclusion is inescapable: no oral Torah, no God.

Our choice then is between Torah—both Torahs—and the void. As the theologian Will Herberg argued decades ago, where Torah is absent, some other ideology rushes to fill the vacuum left in our souls. We must bow down to something, and there is no shortage of secular "values" available for worship. When, quite innocently, American Jews (or their grandparents) were led away from Torah Judaism, the idols became fruitful and multiplied. Here are a few:

Liberalism, that ideology of the American socioeconomic elite among whom most Jews live and work, reigns as the fattest and smuggest god in our pantheon. For many, the Torah as a source of moral authority has been nudged aside by the editorial page of the *New York Times*.

Then comes the Holocaust, the veneration of whose victims allows Jews to share in the trendy cult of victimhood. With constant invocations of a fabled nationwide anti-Semitism, scare-mongering groups like the Anti-Defamation League keep this god's altar-fire burning.

When God instructed the Jewish people to seize the land of Israel from its Canaanite inhabitants, He told us to destroy the idols there. Today Israel—or rather the secular state on top of the land of Israel—has replaced Torah in many Jewish minds as the defining interest of the committed Jew, and has become another idol. In their sermons, even some Orthodox rabbis feel compelled to give congregants what they seem to want: less about Torah and more about Israeli politics and the Holocaust.

A fourth god has been constructed in the form of Jewish ethnicity. This is the most insidious because its concerns are hard to distinguish from those of Torah Judaism. Worshipers of the ethnicity idol fret about "continuity" and "unity," threatened respectively by intermarriage and Jews who speak frankly about Jewish idolatry. Ethnicists generally ignore the Torah in their own lives, but praise it as a useful tool for discouraging others from wedding Gentiles. For reasons that are mysterious to me, they believe the continuing existence of a group of people calling themselves "Jews," whatever these Jews happen to believe or not believe about God, should be an urgent priority. All their boosterism has failed to slow the dreaded custom of intermarriage, but who cares? If we have no mission from God, maybe we should all marry Episcopalians, disappear with dignity, and thus quit inflicting ourselves on our Christian neighbors—with our liberalism, our chauvinism, our self-pity.

If, on the other hand, God does have a mission for us, the only hope of convincing our fellow Jews to join in is to begin talking about that mission, and about God, explicitly and publicly, making Judaism itself the principal object of organized Jewish life.

This will never happen, no sizable revival will take place, under the present generation of Jewish leaders, for whom Judaism remains principally a question of ethnicity. Those leaders who have faith are mostly too shy to discuss it in public. Of the ones who do speak openly of Judaism as truth, few venture out of their ghettos to confront the secular world and inspire the cosmopolitan young Jews who desperately need to hear about God and the Torah. (A notable exception to these rules has been Rabbi Daniel Lapin's organization, Toward Tradition.)

But even without any concerted help from our elders, thousands of young secular Jews have returned to the understanding of Judaism as a statement of truth about God and man. The *baal teshuvah* (returnee) phenomenon has been the most significant Jewish event to take place in my lifetime (I am thirty). Hardly a week goes by that I do not meet a person in his twenties or thirties, raised ignorant of Judaism in a Conservative synagogue or Reform temple (as I was), who has be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gun his Jewish education as an adult and considers himself today, as a twenty-eight-year-old I know puts it, a "Jew in training."

"*Reishit hokhma, yir'at haShem*," says the line in Psalms: "The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord." Though generally translated as "fear," *yir'ah* really means something more like "the awareness that we stand in God's presence." Among the Jews of my generation, one sees more incipient *yir'at haShem* than in many generations of our American Jewish forebears. A growing number of us believe Judaism is not just useful, but true. With grace from God, the work of tearing down the idols will start with us, and continue with our children.

DAVID KLINGHOFFER, *literary editor of* National Review, *is writing a book about his religious evolution for the Free Press.*

Peter Knobel

FOR YEARS I have struggled to define precisely my belief in God. I treated it as a philosophical and theological question which could be answered in a systematic way. However, I have found that my belief is rooted in experience and story. The narrative portions of our tradition which reflect the collective and individual experience of our people provide a set of stories which reveal God's complexity and presence without resolving my doubts in a systematic way. I resonate to the Lurianic myth of God's brokenness which produced a world in need of repair. I accept as the mission of my life and as the mission of the Jewish people the responsibility to repair the divine by performing *mitzvot* which heal the world (*tikkun olam*). God is a reality Who affects my life and is to be found in the Torah.

The text of the Torah, both written and oral, is the mediated word of God. It is the divine light contained in vessels of human construction. It is the historical record of our encounter with the divine, sacred and flawed at the same time, binding and subject to re-vision—re-reading. The give and take of talmudic argument is the paradigm for my relationship to the text. In that sacred conversation, I discover God's presence and therefore revelation.

For me, the structure of sacred days and sacred acts are binding. For example, it is mandatory to observe the Sabbath, but within the mandate there is a plurality of proper responses by individuals and communities. *Oneg* (joy), *kedushah* (holiness), and *menuhah* (rest) become the criteria by which we judge which acts to perform on the Sabbath and which to refrain from. On the other hand, the statement in Genesis 1:27 that all humankind is created in the divine image has been an important meta-*halakhic* principle which has determined that men and women have equal roles in the community and that God-language must transcend gender, and which, combined with the verse that we must love the stranger (Leviticus 19:18), has led to my involvement in interfaith work. In all areas of life we apply the texts and insights of the *halakhah*, bringing to it the best of contemporary knowledge, and we determine what God wants us to do in a particular situation. The process, if seriously applied, transforms our actions into *mitzvot* (commandments) which preserve the Jewish people and repair the world.

I continue to take seriously the concept of chosenness. Our having been singled out to be a "light to the nations" and a "holy nation" remains a major motivation of continued Jewish existence. Our survival is a grand mystery which for me is a sign of chosenness. It is a constant challenge which is a source of responsibility and pride. Our unique role in both the Diaspora and in the reborn state of Israel is to demonstrate that we are the advocates of a society based on economic and social justice. As a minority we are vigilant on behalf of all minorities, calling the power structure to task, and as a majority we must be even more vigilant in order to demonstrate to ourselves and God that we will use power not to oppress but to liberate.

The Holocaust is for me the equivalent of our exile in Egypt—a frightening example of how human evil when unchecked threatens not only our existence but God's existence as well. It has reinforced my belief in partnership between God and humankind and the special role which our faith plays in encouraging others to remain believers.

The state of Israel is a remarkable testimony to the power of hope in response to human evil. It is an opportunity in a new way to sanctify the political process as a people in charge of its des-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tiny. It is a utopianism which is constantly tempered and challenged by *realpolitik*. It has given us two new sacred days, marking Israel's independence and the liberation of Jerusalem, respectively, through which we testify to God's role in contemporary history. They represent the unfolding of new *mitzvot* in our day and are a reminder that God's revelation is not once and for all but continuously present.

If the Holocaust demonstrates that human evil will not be overcome by humanity alone, that only in divine-human partnership can the world be redeemed, the state of Israel is a sign of hope that the collective restoration of the Jewish people might portend the beginning of a new age. However, I am keenly aware of the danger of messianism. We must place our faith in redeeming deeds which gradually repair God and the world. Our witness to God makes God manifest in the world. When the repair is complete it will become apparent because the underlying conditions of human suffering will have been overcome. Our goal is messianic but we must place our faith in the collective effort of all good people to do God's work rather than trust in the miraculous intervention of God through any individual.

The openness of American society is the greatest gift the Jewish people have received, for it enables us to choose our way of life freely. As the pundits have written, we are all Jews by choice. This means that many will fall away, because we have not furnished them with a demonstrated Jewish existence which provides for personal happiness and significant living within a specific community. Our emphasis on personal happiness without a concomitant emphasis on sacred living has led many people to find Jewish life meaningless. On the other hand, one of the characteristics of American life is the crossing of boundaries between groups. Intermarriage is not a Jewish phenomenon alone but cuts across the religious, ethnic, and racial spectrum: it is the "promise" of America where the individual counts above community, and therefore our most serious challenge is to offer a highly educated, thoroughly acculturated, and materially successful Jewish community a way to reframe its life in an explicitly Jewish manner. We must show by example that living and thinking Jewishly make a significant difference. This means that synagogues, Federations, and other Jewish communal agencies must revise their vocabulary to reflect the uniquely Jewish character of their mission. They must make explicit the theological underpinnings of their work and reconnect even the most mundane and secular activities to the concept of doing God's work.

At the same time, this will require a recognition that authenticity does not reside in any single subgroup. In fact, what gives me hope for the Jewish future is the incredible religious creativity which is found in so many places. In the Reform movement we have begun a process which reintegrates ritual and ethics, so that the two realms of *mitzvot* point back and forth to one another and make possible the sanctification of every moment in an exciting and world-repairing manner.

The denominational and ideological divisions in the Jewish community are both a strength and a weakness. If the conversation is a respectful encounter in which each person lives by the talmudic maxim that "these and these are the words of the living God" and the argument is "for the sake of heaven," divisions enrich discourse and provide fertile ground for the continual flourishing of Jewish life. However, the growing distance between many elements within Orthodoxy and the rest of religious Jewry is unfortunate. The Jewish future is to be found in pluralism and in genuine dialogue. Those who stand opposed to pluralism and dialogue will find themselves increasingly irrelevant in spite of some Pyrrhic victories along the way.

Jewish unity will be forged by real respect for difference. Jewish unity is illusory except when we are threatened from the outside. The battles and name-calling will continue but the majority will not abide a tyranny of the minority.

I detect in the Jewish community a genuine quest for meaning which is beginning to blossom into a real religious revival. In part, it comes from a dissatisfaction with secularism and, in part, from a growing interest in religion in the non-Jewish community. There is serious exploration in all quarters which is exciting. A new American Judaism has been emerging which will be post-denominational. The challenge will be for denominational institutions to respond to this new religiosity in creative and supportive ways.

PETER KNOBEL *is rabbi of Beth Emet-The Free Synagogue (Reform) in Evanston, Illinois.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Norman Lamm

YES, IT goes without saying that I believe in God. But my big and terrifying question is whether *He* believes in *me*. . . . More than a cute answer, this is a religious as opposed to a theological response. Theology, a monologue by man about God, has its place on the periphery of the consciousness of a believing Jew. In the center, however, stands God, and man must not merely *think about* Him, but *respond to* Him as part of the dialogue between man and his Creator. The creation of the human race was an act of faith by God in man, and the response of man determines whether that confidence was vindicated or misplaced.

In Judaism, the will of God is made known to man in the Torah, mostly in the form of *mitzvot*, commandments. These commandments are, by their very nature, binding. They summon man to obey, and the human reaction comes on many levels and is accompanied by a variety of emotions. It is this interplay between summons and response, and their almost infinite variety of nuances and subtleties, that determines the quality of one's religious experience. But underlying all is the conception of the *mitzvot* as theonomous rather than autonomous: we may understand or not understand a commandment, prefer one *mitzvah* to another, but all God's will must be obeyed.

Israel was chosen at Sinai as "a holy nation and a kingdom of priests." A "holy nation" is a mission for the polity in and for itself: to grow in sanctity as a godly people. A "kingdom of priests" is the outward reach of the Jewish enterprise in the world: to be a priest-teacher to all of humanity, inviting it by both word and example to fulfill the "image of God" in which every human being was created. The two are linked: Israel cannot teach if it is not itself informed, and therefore it must always strive to be a "holy nation." And its own inner mission is unfulfilled if it fails to communicate holiness—in its numinousness and its ethical consequences—as "a kingdom of priests" to the rest of the world.

The Torah makes it quite clear that we were chosen neither because of our intrinsic merit nor in order to lord it over others, but by virtue of the patriarchs, especially Abraham, whose heart was "found" by God to be faithful and who was promised a posterity which would carry on his work of "proclaiming the name of God" to the world.

The distinctive role of the Jewish people in today's world is blurred, because our people is hopelessly fragmented, with most Jews as unacquainted with their own history as they are ignorant of the fundamentals of their traditions and its texts. I regard as an aberration the notion that the "liberal agenda" so favored by most American Jews is the true mission of world Jewry. Transforming politics, no matter how high-minded, into a religion is a species of contemporary idolatry and is particularly peculiar when espoused by people for whom the separation of piety from politics is an unassailable dogma. The message of Torah must become clear to Jewry before it is propounded to the rest of mankind.

It is therefore incumbent upon that segment of the people which is genuinely and wholeheartedly committed to Torah, whatever the differences in interpretation that divide them, to become the surrogates of all Israel as the "kingdom of priests." That mission must be expressed in universal rather than in parochial terms, and in a manner that is both true to the sources and comprehensible to contemporary men and women who have gone through the experience of modernity. In its broadest terms, that means the teaching of the dignity of humankind (the "image of God"), the unity of all His creatures ("for have we not all one father?"), the concern for the well-being of society (*tikkun olam*), the sanctity of life ("he who saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world"), the ultimate redemption of mankind (the belief in messiah—too much to elaborate in a short statement!), etc. More specifically, it means the seven Noahide laws as prescribed by the *halakhah*.

Such a program, whether conceived of narrowly or broadly, incorporates much of the more generous sentiments of modern Jews at the same time as it rejects the hedonism and relativism that have been adopted by secularist Jews as fundamental to their outlook.

The Holocaust, incomprehensibly cruel, has shaken my faith—but not destroyed it. The emergence of Jewish independence, especially after the Holocaust, has reinforced my faith—but not convinced me that we necessarily live in messianic times. The confluence of both in my consciousness has stretched the perimeters and deepened the quality of my faith, and made me more tolerant of both those who lost their faith and those who clearly perceive the footsteps of messiah in the state of Israel. Most of all, it has made me more consciously Jewish and, at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

same time, less tolerant of pat answers and simplistic formulations about the truly overarching questions of life and destiny.

To the extent that political views reflect broad cultural orientations, the political center to right-of-center provides the most accommodating environment for the growth of Jewish religious life and, hence, Jewish continuity. If the Left is the home of secularism, materialism, permissiveness, etc., and the Right of a repressive conformity and religious fundamentalism (both descriptions are exaggerated), Jewish life in America will not flourish; the former encourages values that are thoroughly inimical to Judaism, and the latter is threatening to Jews who live in a country with a Christian majority.

Jewish tradition has suffered enormously under the cultural hegemony of the elitists of the Left. The academy and the media, among others, have not proved hospitable to religion in general and to Jewish religion in particular. A right-of-center orientation—inclining to traditional values in such matters as sexual morality—which also respects differences in our multicultural society, and which steers clear of dogmatic extremisms of both Right and Left, will foster Jewish commitment more than either end of the political-cultural spectrum.

Jewish "unity" is a theme guaranteed to evoke an industrial-size yawn. It is a chimerical nostrum regularly invoked by organizational drumbeaters, not an idea capable of real expression. It is best to give up the ghost and speak not of unity, but of civility, respect, and cooperation—where possible. It is inconceivable for me, as an Orthodox Jew, to think of genuine Jewish religious unity when Reform, currently the largest movement, has embraced patrilinealism, ordained gays and lesbians as Reform rabbis, and otherwise given enthusiastic ecclesiastical approval to almost every avant-garde liberal movement in the general society. Extremes beget extremes, and significant segments of Orthodoxy are moving in the opposite direction, demanding conformity, and associating almost automatically with the more (or even most) right-wing political movements both in America and Israel.

It is a moot question as to which side began the process of estrangement. The fact is that real unity is impossible and even unthinkable today, and the best and most advisable policy is for all to seek enough common ground to devise an agenda which will benefit the entire people.

There can be no large-scale revival of *Judaism* as long as *Jews* are vanishing. With out-marriage at an all-time high, the birth rate below replacement, and assimilation rampant, it is hard to conceive of a broad revival of Judaism in this country. But this pessimism applies only to the near future. Looking further ahead, I see a rearrangement of forces in a shrunken American Jewish community—one that is far more committed to Torah, with a much higher birth rate, paying real attention to Jewish education, and that holds the promise of growing into a more populous, self-confident, and religiously committed community—all this, of course, depending upon the nature of the environing society and developments within the state of Israel. The great question at that time will be whether a modicum of cohesiveness can develop between the then much larger religious segment and the smaller but still significant secularist/liberal groups. That is what worried and enlightened Jewish leadership must address itself to—now, not later, when it may well be too late.

NORMAN LAMM *is president of Yeshiva University (Orthodox). His newest work,* Hasidic Religious Thought: Sources and Commentary, *is to be published shortly by KTAV.*

Ruth Langer

GOD HAS never called to me out of a thorn bush; I lay no claim to personal revelation, but in myriad ways my adult life has been a constant and growing response to God's voice. An adolescent awakening, spurred by a new awareness of Zionism and the Holocaust, taught me about identity with the people of Israel and drove me to learn as much as I could about our history and our ways. From badgering congregational rabbis I next turned to serious university study and growing personal observance. Studying Torah, hearing God's voice through its words ever more intensively as I completed studies for the Reform rabbinate, made the world of traditional Judaism ever more approachable and congenial. Now, as a professional, I study and teach Torah; as a wife and mother, I maintain a traditional Jewish home, belong to a modern Ortho-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dox congregation, and send my children to an Orthodox day school.

While it is only in retrospect that I see God's participation in my maturation process, I can only ascribe my present life to divine providence. Today, I am the only professor of Jewish studies in the theology department at Boston College, a large Jesuit university. For some reason, Boston College waited three years to fill this position, not knowing that I was living down the street producing a dissertation. Then, from among dozens of highly qualified applicants, they selected me for the job. I take none of this for granted, and it has shaped my piety and my teaching.

Having been given this opportunity, I must respond to the divine mandate. I teach that God has chosen Israel for a particular and difficult task, the substance of which is expressed in Israel's response to God's commands and in its dreams of a messianic future. In many ways, I feel I have been chosen to respond to a divine command. Just as the historical process of Judaism consists of a continual effort to understand God's command, so too must I understand my personal mission in order to fulfill it properly and contribute what I can to the redemption of our world.

How do I represent and present Judaism at Boston College? Most of my students and colleagues are Catholic; many of the rest are Protestant. Only a few are Jews. Inevitably, then, my Judaism comes into constant dialogue with Christianity. This challenges me to formulate and articulate my beliefs in a theologically sophisticated manner, in an integrally Jewish manner, and in terms which will communicate the essence of Judaism. While I struggle to present the totality of Judaism as a rich and multivocal tradition, I also recognize that I represent Jews and Judaism, and that what I teach must also be me and mine.

Because Boston College is a Catholic institution, religion is a topic of discussion and it shapes many aspects of university life. The prevailing atmosphere, though, is one of openness; many want to understand Judaism and to respect it. When my few Jewish students enter into these discussions, they often discover the limits of their own knowledge of their heritage. It is at this point that I provide them with the opportunity to learn more, and in the process of this learning, they become better and more committed Jews.

Life in secular America has created great challenges for Jews. It has allowed individuals to drift without ever asking deep questions about their religious tradition and its distinctiveness. However, Jews must leave this complacency behind when they enter into contact with religious Americans, especially with those who are genuinely interested in learning from other traditions, and even with those challenging Judaism with missionary intent. Jews, traditionally advocates of secular American society, have much to gain from a religiously engaged society, too. Questions are asked, learning opportunities offered, and, most critically, Jewish education of children gains in priority. While the growth of day schools is more than a simple reaction to living in Christian America, such education for children, particularly at the high-school level, will be the major source of Jewish continuity and perhaps even revival in our times.

This is not to say that I advocate a retreat to the ghetto. When we fail to interact with our greater society, we present just as difficult a problem for the future of Judaism. The very act of dialogue with non-Jews not only challenges us to think more deeply about our Judaism, but also limits the degree to which we can become the scapegoated "other." When we live in a world in which Christians are genuinely interested in addressing the ingrained anti-Semitism and supersessionism of their tradition, can we fail to respond? This interest may be driven by post-Holocaust guilt, but it addresses issues which have plagued Jewish life for millennia. As this dialogue gradually grows to include Muslims, too. we certainly have room to dream of the possibility of a messianic peace.

A true messianic age cannot arrive until Jews also respect and communicate with each other. I have dear relatives and friends who are as passionately committed to Reform Judaism as other relatives and friends are to right-wing Orthodoxy. Just as thoughtful, learned Orthodox Jews argue over the details of what God demands of us, so, too, do Reform Jews. Our God is the same; our paths and areas of deep concern are different. Each challenges the other to communicate on the other's terms, and—often without admitting it—each takes up the challenge. Our tensions, our arguments, arise from too much emphasis on the detail of the moment, and too little attention to the long-term picture and to the undeniable integrity of the other. Our arguments are often not among thoughtful members of the various groups, but between the thought-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ful members of one group and the all too commonly disengaged, insufficiently learned members of another. We will always argue, but an argument "for the sake of heaven" is constructive, helping us to discern God's will. I cannot but feel that God desires this process more than the complacency which grows from uniformity and lack of challenge.

There has never been Jewish religious unity, and perhaps there never should be. Jews have never lived in total harmony with their non-Jewish neighbors, and perhaps never will. But the energy generated by these relationships, by these dialogues, is necessary for the future of Judaism. It is a place in which to perceive the "hand" of God.

RUTH LANGER *is assistant professor of Jewish studies in the theology department at Boston College. She received rabbinic ordination and a Ph.D. in Jewish liturgy from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform) in Cincinnati.*

Daniel Lapin

SEE IF you can guess the missing word in the opening sentence of Maimonides' monumental code of Jewish law, *Mishne Torah*: "The foundation of the entire structure and the pillar of all wisdom is to _____ that there is a Fundamental Cause [God]." The missing word is not "believe" but "know." The eternal challenge to the Jew of faith is to acquire so clear an understanding of how the world works that God's role becomes obvious. This has nothing to do with fervent proclamations of faith or serendipitous moments of epiphany. It has everything to do with years of disciplined intellectual dedication. It may not be easy but neither is body-building. In both cases, devotees consider the effort worthwhile; what is more, both provide highs along the way.

The path to both knowing and loving God is of course the Torah, which I find to be a comprehensive blueprint of all reality. I do not mean the book of stories that to many secular Jews is nothing but accumulated mythology for children or, at best, for adults with childlike minds. No, I mean the majestic and mysterious data stream of about 300,000 letters and the ancient oral wisdom that accompanies them.

Think of the millions of lines of software code that make up a computer operating system such as Windows 95. These lines of code are written using the conventional alpha-numeric characters found on any typewriter keyboard. The lines contain many easily recognizable words like "and," "go to," and "stop." It is not hard to imagine that with a little ingenuity and effort the characters, words, and numbers could be cunningly arranged to read as a piece of prose. Thus one might encounter what appears to be a lengthy, if poorly written, epic poem while remaining oblivious of its higher software purpose. We would endlessly debate the veracity of the saga and the identity of the author without ever realizing the inestimable value the document possesses when used as an operating system rather than as an improbable narrative. The Torah is planet earth's operating system thinly disguised as a piece of literature.

As such, its laws are every bit as binding as are, say, Newton's laws of motion. Which is to say they do not prescribe as much as they describe. The laws of Torah do not inform us what we should do in the way that the highway code tells us to adhere to the speed limit. They describe the inevitability of cause and effect in societies of people over time. The commandments, the *mitzvot*, resemble the famous law of gravitation that Sir Isaac Newton published in 1666. It is a mistake to suppose that, until the 17th century, Englishmen were free to float above the countryside like untethered helium balloons until Newton ruthlessly suppressed their freedoms with his oppressive new law. Likewise, Torah laws are binding whether we wisely accept them as the rules of the game or attempt temporarily to dismiss them with a defiant shake of the fist. The difference is between living what seems to be an absurd and random existence and living in an ordered world of rules that are never easy but always consistent. This is a lot like the difference between a hippie and a physicist. One resents laws while the other is grateful for them.

Torah laws are designed to do far more than promote decency; they are intended to produce holiness. If a nation's trend-setters are hedonistic, the people will become depraved. If the trend-setters are only decent, the people will be hedonistic. For the people to be decent, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trend-setters must be holy. This has always been the intended role of the Jew in every country. It also explains why those nations that played host to vital and successful Jewish communities so frequently enjoyed tranquility and prosperity.

Without Jewish messianism it would be hard for hope and optimism to exist. We would all wallow in the gloom and pessimism that now mostly pervades the secular Left. If the nukes don't get you, global warming will. They are right. With no vision of a supernatural, if incomprehensible, redemption down the road, we must take the only rational alternative. Overcrowding, a meteorite collision, food shortages, an unstoppable AIDS epidemic; these are only details. The one certainty is oblivion. And if the end is oblivion, well, nothing much really matters in the interim, does it? By eliminating the promise of that glorious day (even if only faintly grasped) on which God will be one and His Name will be one, we gradually but inexorably introduce into society the nihilism of nipples pierced through by safety pins.

As harrowing and monstrous a nightmare as the Holocaust was, we introduce our own brand of nihilism by celebrating it as the central event of modern Judaism. Frankly, it has always puzzled me that intelligent communal leaders lament Jewish youth's indifference to Judaism while simultaneously assuring the same young people that Judaism is essentially about gas chambers and crematoria. What do they expect them to do? It is futile to deplore the lack of Jewish continuity without providing an answer to the fundamental question: why be Jewish? The Holocaust is hardly the answer to that question.

For all its centrality in Judaism, the land of Israel did provide secularized American Jews with an alternative to Judaism as a religion. For the first time in centuries, Jews who rejected God and His Torah laid claim to the mantle of Jewish identity. What actually made it all the more appealing was that unlike the United States, which was rather inconveniently founded by "religious conservatives," modern Israel was actually founded by secular bolsheviks. It yet remains to be seen whether that particular legacy will survive. So far, events entirely affirm my understanding of God's real-estate-related promises to the Jewish people.

After a catastrophic crash, countless investigators gather to find out why an airplane fell out of the sky. The real question is, why did it ever remain airborne? The answer is that it had engines to convert chemical energy into thrust and wings to convert thrust into lift. Remove any one of those elements and the natural condition of gravity would predominate. The story of late-20th-century American Judaism is the story of an airplane running out of fuel. What has then transpired is entirely natural and predictable. Denominational and ideological debates currently raging are the equivalent of food-service problems on a plummeting airliner. They are mere distractions as the altimeter spins dizzyingly downward.

The good news is that for those who wish it, the fuel tanks can be replenished. A vital, successful, and culturally influential Jewish community will reemerge. America will once again draw nourishment, inspiration, and direction from its Jews and the holy fuel of Torah. What, me worry? No, of course not. That is what belief and faith are for. The final chapter in Jewish history is a long way from being written.

DANIEL LAPIN *is founding rabbi of the Pacific Jewish Center (Orthodox) in Venice, California, president of Toward Tradition, and a radio talk-show host on KVI in Seattle.*

Julius Lester

FOR ALMOST five years now I have served as lay religious leader of Beth El synagogue in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. I lead services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as well as one Sabbath each month, when I conduct services Friday night and a Torah study session on Saturday morning. The congregation comprises 60 or so families and single people. Many, if not most, of the couples are intermarried, with some of the more active participants in synagogue life being the Gentile spouses.

Beth El is not unusual in this. Neither is it unusual in its lack of interest in affiliating with any of the movements in Judaism. As the only synagogue in northern Vermont, it seeks to be a place where non-Orthodox Jews can worship, and prayer books of both the Reform and Conservative movements are available for whoever leads services on the Sabbaths when I am not there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Although Beth El is small and in an out-of-the-way place, it is on the cutting edge of Judaism in America because of its conscious decision not to identify itself as Reform, Conservative, or Reconstructionist (Orthodox would be out of the question). Even for many Jews who belong to an affiliated synagogue, such affiliation does not mean much because they are going to do what they want to do, regardless of what Jewish law says. So it is with the members of Beth El.

Yet they attend services. They are curious about Judaism and Jewish law, and are eager to learn. They want a meaningful relationship to Judaism but are not satisfied with the approaches offered by the established movements. But they send their children to the small Hebrew school and struggle to give them a Jewish identity, even though most of them are the only Jewish children in their respective schools.

I do not have many answers for them. First, I believe in God. No, that is not so. When the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung was asked if he believed in God, he said, "I know." Knowledge as a function of the intellect implies the absence of belief. My religious experiences have left me with a knowledge beyond intellect. It is a knowledge which informs much of what I do, in small ways on a daily basis and in major ways when it comes to the life-altering decisions I have made and will make in my life.

Unfortunately such knowledge is not transferable or even communicable. I am aware of this when I speak to the congregation. Many of them are not sure about God and do not understand my passion for God and Judaism. But they are not antagonistic to that passion, and I think some allow it to be a surrogate for a passion they do not have and may never have.

Perhaps they accept my passion more easily because we share an ambivalence about Torah being the literal word of God. Even if Torah is directly from God, I believe that God changes. Every word of Torah given at Sinai is not to be understood today as it was then. Neither is every word to be understood literally. Torah is also metaphor, and metaphors by their nature are permeable and complex. Literalism leads to the cheap high of religious absolutism, and too often absolutism is presented as the model of authentic Judaism. This leaves all other expressions of Judaism prey to the accusation of being Judaisms of convenience.

But it is here that the concept of chosenness acquires new meaning. To be chosen by God is to be given enormous responsibility. To be chosen implies that those chosen also choose—or not. It is the element of choice which makes it impossible to speak confidently any longer of Judaism and makes it necessary that we speak, more accurately, of Judaisms. As long as we speak only of Judaism, there will be power struggles over which is the authentic one, and that is a waste of time. There is an unbridgeable gap between what can loosely be called liberal Judaism (Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist) and Orthodoxy. Someone raised Reform finds an Orthodox service incomprehensible, and vice versa. The twain cannot meet, and it is time this was acknowledged and the sniping ceased between Orthodoxy and the rest of us.

People laugh when I describe myself as Reconservadox, but I am serious. I prefer services in Hebrew, chanted to traditional melodies. I keep a kosher home. I do not like to drive on the Sabbath but will do so sometimes to go to synagogue. However, I use electricity on the Sabbath and will occasionally engage in a secular activity if it is important enough. That would not include going to the mall, but might include a workshop with an important Tai Chi instructor that I could not avail myself of at another time, Tai Chi being an important part of my health regimen. While I am traditional in my worship, philosophically I am more at home with Reform Judaism's emphasis on the responsibility of each individual Jew to study and choose how to live as a Jew. Christianity has survived quite well with a multiplicity of denominations. Judaism must also.

At the moment, America is home to the largest number of Jews anywhere or at any time in history. Jews have more freedom here to be Jews than at any time in history and more are choosing not to be Jews than at any time in history. That was perhaps inevitable. After so many centuries of having no choice, it is historically understandable that, given the opportunity, many would choose the other side.

But choice works in many ways. Just as there are Jews choosing not to be Jewish, more Gentiles than ever are choosing to be Jewish. Even those born Jewish must choose to live as Jews—whatever that may mean to them. The convert's experience is becoming a paradigm for being Jewish, regardless of natal origin.

I wonder if that is why some members of my congregation in Vermont love me, while others are mystified and intrigued, and yet others resent me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was born Christian and chose Judaism. My presence challenges them to choose Judaism too. I think they find this simultaneously inspiring and frightening.

My love for Judaism has only increased in the fourteen years since my conversion. Judaism asks me to suffuse history with holiness, to choose anew each day the responsibility of holiness. To be holy, Torah teaches, is to be apart from. We must be apart to possess our unique identity; we must be apart to have our unique relationship with God.

The world needs us to be apart as Jews, though it will not acknowledge it. It does not need us to be just another ethnic group, or dissolve into an undifferentiated mass.

The world needs us to assume the difficult task of living as Jews. We do this by making our lives a *b'rakhah*—a blessing that will not be suppressed or destroyed—regardless. To be a Jew is to be a *b'rakhah* of laughter expressing our surprise, delight, and wonder in creation and our place in it as Jews. We are called to be a *b'rakhah* because to be a Jew is to be in love—with a God, a people, and a land. To be a Jew is to live that love—boldly, defiantly, and joyously.

JULIUS LESTER *is a writer and teaches Judaic studies, English, and history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.*

Jon D. Levenson

YES, I DO believe in God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Creator and Master of the world, Who has singled Israel out from all peoples and given them His Torah, and Who will redeem them and all the world in the messianic consummation. I refuse, however, to justify my belief in God by reference to anything other than Him, as if something else—a philosophy, an experience, a social identity—could be more certain and more fundamental than God Himself. Belief in God is never really that if it is only one of many beliefs one holds. Instead, it must be the foundation and center of all one's belief and action. Nor can it be confined to the cognitive level: it must be continually concretized and enacted in one's life, despite the powerful deflecting force of our own wayward nature.

God's revelation of His Torah does not come in immediate form, but through (and not despite) human language and human culture, specifically the language and culture of biblical Israel and one of its several successors, rabbinic Judaism. The biblical books, for example, are, in part, products of history, and they abundantly display the conventions of composition, attribution, and historiography of the ancient Near Eastern culture in which they emerged. Given the mediate character of revelation, it is impossible to attribute some of the commandments of the Torah to God but others to human culture. All of them deserve to be respected, read liturgically, and studied in detail, for, in theory, they are all owing to divine revelation.

Practice is another matter, for even in rabbinic times, some commandments were defined out of existence or abolished outright. What Jewry needs today, however, is not a way *out of* observance but a way *into it*. Without a sense of the joy of the *mitzvah*, the love of God remains nonexistent or atrophied, as is the case with most Jews (including some very observant ones) today.

The Jews should not regard themselves as a nation whom God happened to choose at a certain point in its history. Rather, one important theological point of the story of Abraham is that Israel was an idea in God's mind before it was a people in history, called into existence by God's mysterious act of choosing (an act of passionate love). The Jews are constituted for divine service and lose their *raison d'être* when they become a nation like all the rest, with no higher, supranational goal. The distinctive role of the Jews in the world today is to bear witness to the God to Whom they owe their existence by pursuing sanctification and elevation through the practice and study of Torah.

The Holocaust, in which one-third of our people were annihilated, may well be the most massive event in Jewish history since the Great War with Rome in 66-73 C.E. It exposed the tenacity of anti-Semitism in Western civilization and discredited the naive expectation that education and material advancement would neutralize the dark side of human nature and produce a more humane world.

Though several religious or anti-religious agendas have sought confirmation in the Holocaust, its legitimate impact on Jewish *theology* (as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

opposed to *history*) strikes me as minimal (this is not the case for Christian theology). True, it does strain the mechanistic notion that God's justice is constant in each person's life and realized fully in this world, but this notion, contested already in the Bible, is less profound than the traditional idea of a God Who identifies with innocent sufferers and redeems them from tragedy, though not always in this life. American Jewry's current preoccupation with memorializing the Holocaust is understandable and, in some ways, commendable, but threatens to obscure this key point: how Jews have lived and can continue to live is vastly more important than how they have died. In particular, Jewish education should always be a higher priority than memorializing the Holocaust.

The establishment of the state of Israel is another event of enormous import. Israel represents the return of a large segment of the Jewish people to the promised land, a refuge from anti-Semitism, a stimulus for Jewish self-respect, and a priceless showcase for Jewish life in all its contentious variety. The existence of Israel does not, however, solve the problem of Jewish identity in the modern world. In fact, many Israelis are assimilated Jews themselves, as materialistic and hedonistic as any Americans, and if normalized relations with the Palestinians ever come to be, the familiar scourge of intermarriage may be in the offing there, too. Paradoxically, even ardent Israeli nationalism can represent Jewish inauthenticity, especially when it involves arrogance, self-righteousness, machismo, lack of feeling for the dispossessed, and disregard for human life.

In the contemporary American situation, the greatest stimulus to Jewish belief lies in the erosion of confidence in universalism and the emergence of a more multicultural vision of human identity. This is not in the least to deny that the amorphous movement known as "multiculturalism" exhibits dangerous features, e.g., the loss of a sense of general civic responsibility, an inaccurate and self-serving rewriting of history, a simplistic belief in ethno-cultural determinism, and the treatment of truth, goodness, and beauty as mere mystifications of power relations. But in the social sphere, it is part of a momentous cultural shift that signals a new and widespread skepticism about the Wasp as the ideal American and about assimilation as an unmitigated good. And in the philosophical sphere, it indicates a similar doubt that the neutrality and objectivity associated with modern science characterize the only valid way of knowing or the highest one.

These trends hold out the possibility, already a reality among many, that the long-ignored sources of Judaism and the practices associated with them can be recovered. In addition, the spiritual hunger that the culture of acquisition and self-expression has failed to assuage is adding further fuel to the recovery of Judaism among those who have never known it or always misunderstood it.

Several prominent features of the American situation, however, pose formidable challenges to Jewish life. One of these is the melting pot, which, for all the talk of multiculturalism, continues to bubble, with intermarriage of various sorts (including interracial marriage) increasing geometrically. The illiberal truth that intermarriage is Jewish suicide has not been well-received among that most liberal of groups, American Jews. The high estimation of personal autonomy in contemporary American culture is another obstacle to Jewish renewal, for this makes it likely that even when commandments are observed, it is only as a matter of individual choice and not as an act of faithfulness and obedience to a commanding God.

In other words, being observant to whatever degree is not necessarily any indication that one is attempting to overcome the ethic of self-gratification and to replace it with the ethic of altruism and self-discipline that is at the heart of authentic Jewish living. The notion that personal autonomy and the quest for self-fulfillment are sacrosanct can also interfere with acceptance of important elements in Jewish morality, such as the laws governing sexual behavior and the law that a fetus may be killed only in the rarest and gravest of cases.

There is indeed cause to worry about Jewish religious unity. In the past, however much internal Jewish movements differed in theology and practice, marriage among their adherents was usually possible, and the Jews remained one people. Now, owing to serious differences regarding what constitutes a valid conversion and, even more, to the recent acceptance by some groups of patrilineal descent as a criterion for Jewishness, this is no longer the case. The move toward increasing stringency, insularity, and triumphalism among many on the Right has not helped.

Demographic data suggest a grim future for Judaism in America, but there is more in heaven and earth than is comprehended in demographic surveys. I sense a deepening concern about the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

erosion of the moral foundations of society and mounting doubt that secularism can repair or sustain them. Among Jews, probably the most secular group in America, this rethinking has barely begun. Its fruits remain to be seen.

JON D. LEVENSON *is the Albert A. List professor of Jewish studies at Harvard University and the author, most recently, of* The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity *(Yale, 1993) and* Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence *(Princeton, 1994).*

Nathan Lewin

THE TALMUD (*Shabbat* 97a) reports God's description of the Jewish people as "*ma'aminim b'nei ma'aminim*," believers who are the descendants of believers. Thanks to the believers who were my ancestors, some of whom were murdered because of their beliefs, I have inherited a faith finely honed by the most profound thinkers in Jewish history.

Eight centuries ago, the greatest Jewish teacher since Moses the Lawgiver, Moshe ben Maimon (the Rambam or Maimonides), articulated thirteen principles of faith that are the guideposts accepted by observant Jews *be'emunah shelemah*, that is, with total faith. I personally accept the Rambam's thirteen principles unconditionally. They include belief in the divine revelation of Torah and the immutability of its commandments.

My beliefs are not the product of any hard thinking on my part, or of any individual genius. To be honest, I spend little time worrying about them. My personal views concerning the beliefs transmitted to me do not deserve to be spread on the pages of an important national journal of thought and opinion.

In addition to *emunot* (beliefs), however, I have, to adapt the title of Saadia Gaon's classic 10th-century work, *deot* (opinions). Some of my opinions rise to the level of convictions firmly held, albeit not *be'emunah shelemah*. In response to your invitation to give my "view of the religious scene," I make the following observations as a practicing Orthodox Jew who has tried to facilitate and encourage religious observance by fellow Jews in the United States.

The wrong question. This symposium's emphasis on the "belief" of America's Jews demonstrates why American Judaism is frail and why its future is being questioned. COMMENTARY mistakenly engrafts onto Judaism the religious priorities of America's overwhelmingly Christian Protestant society. Christian Americans think that belief (and its corollary, organized worship) should be the only expression of one's religion. The questions posed in the symposium suggest that the future of Judaism in America depends on how deeply and profoundly American Jews *believe*.

I think that the future of Judaism in America depends on whether America's Jews *act* as Jews. Authentic Judaism rejects the concept, central to American Christian doctrine, that credo and prayer are the sum and substance of religion. We are closer, in this regard, to Muslims and Native Americans than to Episcopalians and Baptists. Our religious community will survive if America's Jews live their lives, celebrate Sabbaths and Jewish holidays, and commemorate life-cycle events as the Jewish people has been doing for 30 centuries, and if they implement, in practice, the moral and ethical principles of the Torah. COMMENTARY recognizes this incidentally. The editors refer to conduct rather than belief only in their introductory statement that there has been "a surprising movement . . . toward a return to religious practice."

The greatest stimuli. The most effective internal stimulus for the continuity of Judaism in the United States is religious education that instructs new generations how Jews should live. An encouraging omen is the success of the *baal teshuvah* movement that, under the auspices of institutions like Chabad-Lubavitch, Aish HaTorah, and countless community and synagogue organizations, has brought thousands of American Jews back to varying degrees of religious observance.

The greatest external stimulus is the proliferation of ethnic, racial, and religious groups that make distinctive dress and behavior respectable and even desirable. Jewish observance is facilitated if nonconformist conscientious conduct is protected by law. It behooves us, therefore, to demand freedom *for* religious observance and deemphasize, and possibly jettison altogether, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American Jewish community's traditional posture as the champion of freedom *from* religion.

The greatest obstacle. For this reason, I consider the greatest obstacle to the continuity of Judaism in America to be the slavish, mindless, and reflexive devotion of American Jewish leadership to the "Wall of Separation" between church and state. That Wall is more revered by American Jewish organizations than is the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the authentic and lasting symbol of Judaism. Crushed under the Wall of Separation, which, to my mind, is built on a misunderstanding of the values protected by the First Amendment, are many yeshivas and other Jewish religious institutions that cannot survive in today's world without the support that government should provide nondiscriminatorily for religious and conscientious convictions and practices.

There was a time, possibly 60 or 70 years ago, when the threat of Christian proselytizing presented a great danger to America's Jews. It made sense in those bygone days to ensure that government, including public schools, would be as secular as possible, so that Jewish children would not be converted to Christianity by zealous missionary government employees, including public-school teachers. But it is rampant secularism that is today the greatest threat to the continuity of Judaism in the United States. Americans who are born Jewish find the society in which they grow up to be so comfortable that their Judaism, which means little to those who have had no religious education, is surrendered without a second thought.

Contemporary events. The Holocaust, from which my immediate family and I escaped in September 1939, but which claimed as victims three of my grandparents as well as two uncles and an aunt, has fortified my own faith. There is no rational explanation for the survival of Jewish observance and faith through centuries of persecution and torture, culminating in the Holocaust, other than to accept the proposition that the Jews are a chosen people and that a Supreme Being has ordained the way of life which has endured with our people even through their greatest travails.

The partial realization of the vision that Jews retained during the most devastating times—the creation of a state of Israel—also reaffirms my belief. The existence of a Jewish state and frequent visits to Jerusalem energize my own religious consciousness and encourage me to improve my observance and understanding. But I recognize that Israel both strengthens and weakens American Judaism. It bolsters the American Jewish community because Israel is the world center of authentic Jewish life, a fountain of Jewish learning, and a source of pride and moral strength for the world's Jews. Yet Israel's existence weakens American Jewry by siphoning off its most promising talent and future leadership. Many Jews who take their Judaism seriously choose to live in the Jewish state.

My prediction. Only when Jewish lives are at stake need the community speak with one voice. Disagreement and debate are hallmarks of a vital Jewish community. I am not, therefore, a proponent of muzzling dissent or of insisting on a false façade of unity vis-à-vis the non-Jewish world.

I have confidence that there is a significant prospect for large-scale revival of Judaism in America if, and only if, two fundamental conditions are satisfied: first, if the leadership of the American Jewish community frees itself from its peculiar obsession with a secular state and seeks ways of facilitating religious observance for all. Second, if the Rambam's twelfth principle of faith is not realized first, that is, if the messiah continues to tarry.

NATHAN LEWIN *is a Washington lawyer who has frequently represented Orthodox Jewish causes before the Supreme Court.*

David L. Lieber

IN REVIEWING my contribution to "The State of Jewish Belief" some 30 years ago, I find myself in general agreement with the position outlined there, though my views have been tempered by events. I still consider myself a "modernist," but am no longer so sure that reason and experience alone will suffice to keep future generations Jewish or, for that matter, save humankind. Without a transcendent point of reference, it is difficult for me to see how human beings can be persuaded to make the personal sacrifices required to keep the race from ecological disaster or avoid a struggle for decreasing resources. Without a conviction that Jewish life and practices have a valuable contribution to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

make to this effort, I find it difficult to grasp what will, in the long run, keep our young people's fidelities.

In the light of these considerations I now turn to the questions this new symposium raises.

The issue is not whether I believe in God; I do. The question is what I mean by that. To me, "God" refers to the creative power at work bringing order out of chaos and maintaining the interrelatedness of all things. Who or what "God" stands for—a process, a being, a force—I do not know, nor does anyone else. What is clear is that "God" is a human construct which enables us to enter into a personal relationship with that power. As a Jew, I address Him as *Adonai*, stressing both the unity and the sovereignty of the divine.

Since I find wisdom and inspiration in Torah, I have no difficulty in seeing it as the product of an ongoing revelation, in the same sense in which all revolutionary human insights and discoveries are revelatory. I do not believe in the literal divine authorship of the Torah: its teachings have a *prima-facie* claim on me, but they constantly have to be reexamined in the light of increasing knowledge and ever greater moral sensitivity. As a Conservative Jew, I give the benefit of the doubt to the tradition and look to my rabbinic colleagues for their guidance. In doing so, I believe I am in line with what rabbis have done through the centuries.

The enduring nature of Israel's covenant with God remains central to Judaism today, and holding on to it, I believe, is critical to our survival as a people. It offers a reason for that survival—to be "a light unto the nations"—and a method, a way of life which seeks to make God manifest in the world. This may have originally constituted a claim to exclusivity, but, as early as the 8th century B.C.E., the prophet Isaiah proclaimed that all peoples would some day serve the God of Israel as they learned to accept the restraints of the moral law. This would, in effect, usher in the messianic age, as Maimonides later interpreted it. But while Maimonides clearly believed in the supernatural coming of a messianic figure, I do not. I find much more congenial a classical rabbinic observation that human salvation will dawn on the world imperceptibly, just as the first glimmer of the morning light is seen in the skies following the darkness of the night.

The Holocaust has made the renewal of our commitment to the covenant all the more necessary, since it and the other genocidal acts with which we are, alas, too familiar demonstrate the horrors of which human beings are capable. They cannot be eliminated by the use of force alone. Only societies genuinely concerned about social justice and which care about educating the hearts as well as the minds of their people will make the difference. Here religion has a critical role to play.

As for Israel, it is important to me not only because it is the historic homeland of our people and a place of refuge for those who have nowhere else to go, but because it has the potential of becoming a society informed by the Jewish ethos and governed by its ethics. Still, Israel will only strengthen our opportunity to flourish as a Jewish people if it undertakes seriously both to deepen its Jewish roots and to open itself to the free expression of Jewish religion and culture. Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go to achieve that goal, as the extreme religious polarization in Israel attests.

The situation is no less difficult here at home. The problems posed by ignorance, apathy, and mixed marriage are compounded by the fractioning of the community. The situation is not helped by the general state of American culture with its "anything-goes" morality and its encouragement of greed and selfishness. The breakdown of the home and the disintegration of the community have been devastating for American Jews.

It is true that a widespread disillusionment with contemporary American society has led numbers of Jews to adopt more traditional Jewish practices and affiliations, as also in the Christian community. This represents, however, a relatively small percentage of the American Jewish community, leaving large numbers indifferent to Jewish life and distancing themselves from it. Still, there is a growing core of younger Jews who do care about the Jewish future of their children. This is manifested by their return to the synagogue, by the expansion of day-school education and an interest in adult education, and by an effort to introduce Jewish ritual practices into the home.

What is sad is the continuing fracturing of the religious community, frequently accompanied by mutual recriminations. Thus, the Orthodox question the legitimacy of Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform conversions and point to the Reform acceptance of the principle of patrilineal descent as but another example of the latter's lack of concern for genuine Jewish unity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the other hand, non-Orthodox rabbis resent the triumphalism of the Orthodox and especially their support of the religious establishment in Israel. This has resulted in muted and not-so-muted public denunciations that have not redounded to the honor of the religious community.

In the last few years, centrists in all the religious groups have tried to find some common ground. Whether they will be successful remains to be seen. It is clear, though, that religious pluralism, too, requires certain parameters. If, in fact, there is to be a broad center, there will have to be agreement on what constitutes membership in the Jewish people and how that is to be transmitted to the next generation. (That, by the way, is what makes the Conservative movement so appealing—its unwillingness to compromise on the traditional *halakhic* requirements for conversion, marriage, and divorce.)

Will such a center emerge and, if it does, will it hold? I do not know. It seems likely that, for the foreseeable future, we will not have a common language with the right-wing Orthodox, though we must do all we can to keep our doors open to them. I also believe it may be too late to reclaim large groups of mixed-marrieds and their children. Some will "return" and we should always welcome them, but I would not count on too many doing so, or invest large sums of money for that purpose. Whatever funds are available should rather be used to deepen the knowledge and commitment of those who are still in our midst, in the hope of strengthening their ties to Jewish life.

Do I foresee a large-scale revival of Judaism on American soil? Hardly. But I am not disheartened by that. We always have been small in numbers. What we need is to assure ourselves of a critical mass of educated, committed, and practicing Jews and that, I believe, is possible.

We have the infrastructure. We have a cadre of outstanding scholars in universities throughout the country. We have day schools, camps, and youth movements. By one means or another, including electronic, we can reach every Jew who is interested. Israel, in spite of the present uncertainties, remains a source of hope and pride. Most of all, the great illumination that issues from Torah, as our sages put it, is finally being appreciated by more of our people as they reach out for God.

That is why I remain hopeful of a Jewish future in this land. With the proper leadership and the blessings of the Almighty, we will be able to transmit the rich heritage we have received from earlier generations to those yet to come.

DAVID L. LIEBER *is president-emeritus of the University of Judaism and its Arnold Skovron distinguished service professor of biblical literature and thought. He is also the president of the Rabbinical Assembly, the international association of Conservative rabbis.*

Michael Medved

THE CHIEF distinguishing characteristic of most American Jews is not what they do believe, but what they do not believe.

They do not believe in Jesus as the messiah. Period. End of sentence, end of story. Tragically, for all too many members of today's Jewish community, this rejection marks the sum total of their theological commitment, the beginning and end of their ideological identity as adherents to what is still misleadingly described as "the Jewish faith."

That is why most Jews react so much more negatively toward efforts to convert our children to Christianity than they do to similar attempts directed at those same young people by Buddhists, Hindus, Scientologists, or even Muslims. Since nonacceptance of Jesus is the one common commitment that seems to unify our community, then Jews for Jesus—in contrast to Jews for Buddha or Jews for Krishna or the vastly more popular Jews for Nothing—seem to represent a unique threat to that community's core beliefs.

Today, you can find a rabbi who will eagerly marry a Jew and a non-Jew, or two men or two women, or who will gladly incorporate Zen meditation or neo-pagan symbols or trendy elements of radical politics into a wedding ceremony. It would be difficult or impossible, however, to find any recognized rabbi who would be willing to officiate at a wedding of two professing "Messianic Jews"—even if both of them happened to be children of Jewish mothers and therefore official, *halakhic* members of the people Israel. Once again, acceptance of Jesus is the one theological permutation that Jews of all persuasions find unacceptable, the only issue on which Jewish Americans from the militantly secular to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

militantly hasidic are ready to draw a common line.

Of course, any group that attempts to define itself by what it rejects rather than what it affirms can enjoy only the shakiest, most uncertain existence. Seven-Up might attempt to market itself as "Un-Cola," but Judaism will never survive as "Un-Christianity." Lacking any sense of common commitment or positive purpose, the Jewish community has been famously battered by rising rates of intermarriage and assimilation. A decade ago it seemed possible in some circles to argue that the resulting reduction in the number of active Jews might actually represent a blessing in disguise for our people—but that case is more difficult to make today.

The old argument minimizing the impact of assimilation suggested that it amounted to a normal and healthy winnowing process—a version of Darwinian natural selection that would ensure the "survival of the *frummest*" (most pious). Indifferent Jews and inauthentic expressions of Jewish identity would gradually wither away and disappear, while traditionalists—spearheaded by an Orthodox community newly invigorated by a swelling *baal teshuvah* ("returnee") movement—assumed an unquestioned leadership role. According to this scenario, the Jewish community of the future would be smaller but stronger.

As it turns out, the community does seem to be getting smaller, all right—but it is not stronger in any sense. It is, in fact, more confused and divided than ever before.

For one thing, the various nontraditional strands of Judaism have proved stubbornly uncooperative when it comes to liquidating themselves and politely marching off to the scrap heap of history. Gay and lesbian congregations, for instance, appear to be thriving—as do various forms of New Age Judaism, in all their tie-dyed multiplicity.

Meanwhile, the Orthodox community pointedly failed to play the dynamic leadership role that many had expected of it. Perhaps this reflected the fact that habits of insularity and defensiveness die hard, but it also related to deep disappointments about the *baal teshuvah* movement. Instead of building new bridges between the Orthodox establishment and the secular world they left behind, many of the newly religious enthusiastically embraced the unbending, "black-hat," rejectionist front within the observant world. With a few notable exceptions (like Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald's dynamic National Jewish Outreach Center), the Orthodox seem to have little to say to their fellow (non-Orthodox) Jews—let alone to the world at large.

Does all this mean that my wife and I are wasting our resources with the sacrifices we make to send our children to a Jewish day school? Should we worry that our descendants may be unable to find a *minyan*—or a Jewish mate?

Hardly. Jewish history is full of examples of vital, intellectually productive Jewish communities that have flourished despite small numbers. Though we may become a less visible and influential presence on the American scene in years to come, this country boasts more than enough passionately committed Jews (who often come equipped with more than enough offspring) to continue some sort of active Jewish presence. The reduction in overall numbers, regrettable though it is, need not consign us either to oblivion or irrelevancy. Jews would do well to remember that our enemy, Louis Farrakhan, has managed to exert a significant influence on this country as head of a religious movement, the Nation of Islam, which, according to most press reports, includes only 40,000 members nationwide. This means that there are almost certainly more Lubavitch Hasidim in this country than there are committed Farrakhan followers—and both (very different) groups suggest the impact that a relatively small number of people can achieve if they are sufficiently motivated, impassioned, and united. Motivation, passion, and unity are, however, qualities that seem to be in critically short supply in today's Jewish community.

In the final analysis, we can feel sure of the continued existence of the Jewish people for the most fundamental of reasons: God promised that He would keep us around. He never guaranteed gentle or easy treatment (just read Deuteronomy) but He did say we would survive, as we have.

For American Jews, this does not mean that we will not witness a continued shift from this country to Israel as a center of Jewish energy. To some, including my beloved brother Jonathan who has chosen to make his family's life in Jerusalem, this is a wholesome, unavoidable development. If one assumes the continued growth of Jewish identity and vitality in Israel, then the gradual dwindling of the American community need not be a catastrophe for Jews, but it still would be a shame for America.

The prime hope for averting that setback comes, ironically, from the evangelical Christian movement which most American Jews instinctively dislike and distrust. It is increasingly clear

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that "born-again" Christians and the vigorous counterculture they are creating offer a serious challenge to modernity and secularism, not just a shallow or passing fad. By highlighting the intellectual and practical shortcomings of secularism, the Christian revival may cause some Jews to take a second look at their unquestioning embrace of its bankrupt ideas.

That is why the Christian Right is good for the Jews—despite all the controversy surrounding the recent announcement by the Southern Baptist Convention that its fifteen-million members should treat the conversion of the Jews as a major priority.

Consider the situation on our college campuses. Many Jewish students have by now been approached by one missionary or another, usually quoting Second Isaiah to prove that Jesus was actually the Jewish messiah. The number of Jewish young people who have been "brought to Christ" by such contact is pathetically small, but the number of students who have been led by such encounters into more serious questions about their own Jewish identity—and even into their first contact with campus Jewish organizations—is considerably larger.

By the same token, the deep-seated and nearly universal Jewish resistance to claims of the divinity of Jesus will ensure that even the most engaged and energized sort of Christian evangelism will yield few outright converts. It may, however, create a national atmosphere more hospitable to serious spiritual questions, and to the values of family and self-discipline—thereby encouraging more Jews to discover the timeless truths of their own Torah.

MICHAEL MEDVED *is chief film critic of the* New York Post, *co-host of* Sneak Previews *on PBS television, and the author of seven books. He is also the co-founder of the Pacific Jewish Center in Venice, California.*

Michael A. Meyer

IN AN age dubbed by many as "postmodern," I find that my faith is still that of 19th-century Jewish thinkers, whose modernity, I believe, is not at all passé. Like the Jewish religious reformers and philosophers of 100 and more years ago, who remained under the influence of the Enlightenment but qualified its rationalism with historical awareness and critique, I hold to a rational faith mediated through our tradition and confirmed by personal experience and commitment. Thus my belief in God approximates closely that of the German-Jewish Kantian thinker Hermann Cohen who understood God to be an Ideal to which human lives respond and to which the Jews have responded in unique fashion.

It follows that the Torah is not for me divine revelation in any literal sense. Rather the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Writings, and the rabbinic literature represent our people's ongoing historical endeavor to verbalize their experience of a God Who represents the objective reality of justice, mercy, and love. Since Torah, in the broadest sense, is the evolving expression of our response to God, Jewish history, for all of its secular aspects, becomes in essence a sacred history. Revelation, as the early modern reformers of Judaism held, is indeed progressive—not in the sense that humanity, as a whole, has done an ever better job of living up to its religious awareness, but in that, as we gain more profound moral understandings and undertake broader commitments, we come closer to God.

The God Who is our Ideal is clearly not a personal God except through the metaphors we necessarily employ in prayer. But such a God is incomparably relevant to our religious and moral lives. The Ideal is a source of imperatives for our conduct that are every bit as demanding as those issued by a personal God. On Yom Kippur one confesses failure to live up to the moral absolute that God represents and vows greater effort; in enacting Jewish rituals, one recommits one's life to God. The Ideal does not represent an extension of human will; it challenges individuals to negate selfish desires for the sake of objectives that transcend and often contradict them.

Messianism represents the human thrust toward God. Indeed, it is the sense of nonfulfillment, the awareness that individual lives and social relations remain flawed in our pre-messianic world, that separates us Jews from Christians, for whom the Incarnation made salvation a present and personal reality. The chosenness of Israel, as I understand it, means to be in the messianic vanguard, for it was our prophets who first dreamed the messianic dream of amity among persons and nations.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yet messianism is also gravely dangerous. Pseudo-messianism has afflicted Judaism in various forms during the course of our history, sometimes with devastating results. Today political messianism, to be found among some Orthodox Jews and focused especially upon the state of Israel, represents a serious barrier to peace in the Middle East and bears analogy to fundamentalism within Islam. True Jewish messianism, in my view, points perpetually toward the future, toward a goal always to be striven for but never fully realized in history. Fortunately, the tendency toward apocalypticism in Judaism is largely neutralized by the performance of *mitzvot*, of individual religious commandments. Through commitment to a life of *mitzvot*, whether or not they correspond to the traditional enumeration, we can acknowledge that redemption is not realized suddenly through the fruits of military victory but very gradually, one moral and religious act after another.

We must take care, if we are to preserve Judaism, not to let its future hinge upon the epoch-making events of our waning century. The Holocaust has surely shattered earlier illusions. But it signifies neither an end to faith nor the first revelation of an incipient messianic consummation. What the Holocaust represents religiously is an unprecedented failure of human beings to respond to God. As such, it possesses religious relevance even more for non-Jews than for Jews. For Jews, its remembrance is a sacred obligation that we owe to the victims and a powerful stimulus to moral action. But the Holocaust does not lie at the center of Jewish faith and it must not obstruct the flow of energy from the biblical roots. Similarly, the state of Israel, although clearly a turning point in Jewish history and vitally important for the Jewish future, does not represent, for me, a new metaphysical reality. Its religious significance lies in the opportunities it has created for the enhancement of Jewish religious life and the social application of Jewish religious values. These opportunities remain, as yet, far from realization.

In the state of Israel, liberal Jewish faith is beset by Orthodox intolerance and secularist indifference; in the United States, liberal Judaism is endangered by non-Jewish society's unprecedented readiness to absorb its most appealing ideas and traditions. Because liberalism is founded on toleration, it is widely assumed that non-Orthodox Judaism must be open to syncretistic combinations with Christianity. Judaism is prized as long as it makes no claim to exclusivity or even to its own integrity. Our society recognizes the value of religion (or of "spirituality"), but it will not grant Judaism the right to dwell apart, educating its children in Jewish distinctiveness, drawing predominantly from its own tradition, and employing unique forms of worship and observance. Multiculturalism allows us to be part of the multicolored fabric, but not to weave a tapestry of our own.

Within American Judaism I am most concerned by the extremes. The Orthodox have been moving toward greater intolerance of modern culture and of non-Orthodox fellow Jews, especially those who claim to be no less religious than the Orthodox themselves. At the same time, those furthest removed from commitment to Jewish singularity have given up their resistance to syncretistic pressures. That does not mean all "centrists" within American religious Judaism should band together in a single movement. The denominational divisions that currently exist continue to reflect genuine differences of theology and practice. Among them, with the exception of the extremes, unity on crucial matters for the Jewish people, though not always attained, remains possible.

I doubt very much that there will be a large-scale revival of Judaism in America. There will be revivals, but only modest ones. And they will take place against the backdrop of a demographically declining community and escalating assimilatory pressures brought about, mainly, through mixed marriage. The particularizing role of the state of Israel will therefore become more significant for American Judaism, especially for the non-Orthodox. Within my own Reform community there have been encouraging indications of more intensive Jewish education, reappropriation of significant religious traditions, and greater awareness of the insidious dangers that confront Jewish existence. If these trends continue broadly within American Judaism, then the unique Jewish faith, as an ancient and modern response to a morally demanding God, will survive its contemporary challenges.

MICHAEL A. MEYER *is Adolph S. Ochs professor of Jewish history at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform) in Cincinnati.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jacob Neusner

TO BE, as I am, "Israel," that is, one of the holy people, heirs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, always standing before Sinai to hear the commanding voice that says, "I"—that means to know God through the Torah. To be that Israel is to shape life within the paradigms set forth in the Torah. With all Israel called to Sinai together to affirm God's rule, I am one of that holy Israel that in the Torah and there alone knows God first and best and that finds in the Torah the starting point, goal, and purpose of life, both personal and public.

But then there can be no mere "I," no language such as "I personally believe this or that," but only a "we, Israel." That is where negotiations begin, in the exchange between personal, palpable experience of the here and now and that enchanted realm of shared life in the image, after the likeness, of God made manifest in the Torah, that is called, in secular language, "Judaism." Do I respond to theological inquiries by opening the Torah to the right place and pointing to a pertinent passage? Would that life were so simple! What makes matters interesting is, when I come to the Torah, I always bring myself and take myself away. The negotiation is between the "I" that studies, responding to the Torah out of intensely private existence, and that we, that "all Israel" which, all together and all at once, affirms, "We shall do and we shall obey."

So *we* believe. Do I? Yes, with genuine trust (*emunah*), and for the same reason: the encounter with the Torah transforms. Indeed, it is there that God is made manifest, so I do believe in God, I do believe the Torah to convey God's will, I do believe that the commandments represent that will, I do believe that Israel is God's first love, and that Israel, then, now, and always, accepts God's dominion and bears witness to God in the world.

But these affirmations form not the conclusion but the starting point for systematic reflection. For embodying such abstract affirmations with the flesh of real life in the here and now forms the challenge to Judaic belief. What does it mean, not to believe in, but to know God in the Torah? How shall we reckon what is at stake in living within Israel, God's first love? What does it mean to hold the age in open arms, to embrace and let go at once, such as the yearning for the messiah entails?

The task of the workaday theologian such as all of us must become is to find the match between the paradigm and the present, to identify the enchantment within the ordinary. All of us who study the Torah practice that theology every time we interpret a teaching in the here and now, in the setting of ordinary life—whether public, whether personal. It is one system: we turn the Torah's teachings into homely truths, but aspire also to turn ourselves into how God would see us—"in our image, after our likeness," in the language of Genesis. Were we to live successful lives, we should write, in how we use our time on earth, a commentary to the Torah.

In that same context, what of the critical public issues that by reason of their consequence the Torah encompasses? I find ample space therein for both the Holocaust and the state of Israel. Who can open Isaiah 54 without seeing us, Israel, as we perished, in our millions, or Ezekiel 37 without reflecting on the renewal of us all represented by the return to the land and the building of the state? Much of prophecy finds its realization in our very day, so that in the Torah some days we read the headlines of the morning. These towering moments of our own times form chapters within the Torah, challenges for the study of the Torah and its paradigm to accommodate.

To these affirmations of the Torah the denominational life of American Judaism proves monumentally irrelevant. Denominations do politics, not Torah. No yeshiva, no rabbinical seminary possesses the monopoly of learning, and in one way or another every denomination has committed its noteworthy stupidity in its reading of the Torah, whether through disproportion, whether through lack of perspective, whether through the utter absence of wisdom. But if all fail, all promise success, too. For what I have said may stand for the faith of holy Israel, whether in the most extreme, segregationist Orthodox Judaisms or in the most accommodating, integrationist Reform and Conservative Judaisms, each within its frame of reference. The one Torah that all of us read in synagogue and in study, the one Talmud that all of us ask to impart structure and meaning to Scripture in the here and now—these form a common inheritance. To the Torah no one's life presents a more authentic occasion for realizing truth in the here and now than any other's, and no one's a less promising moment, either.

True, the various Judaisms read matters differently, underscoring difference. But I find the differences trivial, for I know no Judaism that does

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not invoke the Torah, the written part in the light of the oral, and to that common conviction everything else matters very little. The Torah is what nourishes us—a long menu, with sustenance for each. In that context how could we form a more united community than we now do when, in the diverse synagogues, we listen to the proclamation of the same Torah, and from teachers hear essentially congruent interpretations of the Torah? How does a Reform rabbi tell a different tale from an Orthodox one on Passover? Or when it comes to the binding of Isaac or the paradigm of holy Israel set forth in Deuteronomy? And whose *sukkah*, festival booth, will stand more than twenty cubits high? The footnotes give way, this one's to that one's, but the text stands firm.

And to the uncontingent truths of the revealed Torah, the contingencies of sociology and politics make little difference. A revival of Judaism in America? The Torah retains that power it has always exercised, to reach into the lives of ordinary people and endow with sanctity the community formed by those people. The grandchildren of American Jews utterly divorced from the Torah study Talmud in Bnai Brak in Israel, the grandchildren of Torah sages of Brisk, Lithuania, marry Gentiles. Nothing guarantees anything: God rules. That is why the Torah lives in America and requires no revival. People find their way to its teachings and discover themselves therein. Or they lose their way. In the end God governs. Each of us owes God one death, and, in the interim, bears liability also for that huge and interesting conversation with God that each one of us knows as, and calls, life.

Jacob Neusner *is distinguished research professor of religious studies at the University of South Florida, Tampa, and professor of religion at Bard College. He is the author of, among many other books,* Judaism's Theological Voice: The Melody of the Talmud.

David Novak

My faith is in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Whom the Jewish people exists in a unique covenantal relationship. Expression of that faith can only be defined and specified within this covenant between God and His people, into which I have been born and in which I choose to abide.

The covenant consists of three interrelated parts, each one being governed by its own normative form (Torah). First and foremost, there is the written Torah (Scripture), which Jewish tradition has determined to be the directly revealed law of God. Second, this Torah enters the world in order for God to address human beings who have a nature, which, being social, entails moral law that is discernible by human reason. Without allegiance to this prior law (what I would call "proto-Torah"), the Jewish people would not have been capable of submitting itself to God's directly revealed commandments intelligently and freely. The full Torah is more than inter-human morality, but not less than it. And third, there is the oral Torah, which primarily consists of the interpretations of and supplements to the written Torah based on the accumulated experience of the Jewish people (Talmud), a process that is authorized by the written Torah and that is accepted as being under God's special providence.

Because all three aspects of Torah are God's revelation, albeit each in a different mode, I accept all the commandments as personally binding, however much I falter in the observance of them. Also, by engaging in ongoing study of the classical literary sources of Torah and taking a responsible role in the life of the Torah-observant Jewish community, I am empowered to participate actively in debates within the oral Torah as to what the various commandments are and how they are to be interpreted both theoretically and practically.

I believe that God has chosen the Jewish people for a unique relationship with Himself, one whose meaning is primarily understood within the covenant itself. The only meaning of this election for the world here and now is that the elected community should live a life of covenantal faithfulness that testifies to the kingship of God. Thus I believe in the coming of the messiah, who will enable Israel to be fully faithful to God, and be instrumental in the redemptive reconciliation of all humankind with God. In the as yet unredeemed present, belief in the messiah and the final redemption serves to limit the pretensions of human attempts (including religious ones) to construct total human perfection. Recent history, especially, has shown us the disas-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trously blasphemous results of such totalizing human projects.

Every Jew today lives in the sorrow of the Holocaust and the joy of the state of Israel. The sorrow of the Holocaust urges me to do everything I can to defend the safety of the Jewish people, contribute to its growth, and live more faithfully for God, Whose Name, which is inscribed in our Jewish flesh, the murderers attempted to blot out in the world. In terms of the world, this urges me to work for the elementary justice that was so brutally denied to the victims of the Holocaust, and to fight against any injustice, whether done by non-Jews or even by Jews.

The joy of the state of Israel is that the Jewish people is less vulnerable to its enemies than ever before. And it is the means whereby the Jewish people has been given greater access to and sovereignty in the land of Israel promised by God to His people. This urges me to defend its interests in the world, and to work for Israel's emergence as a polity in which the Torah in the fullest sense will have real social authority. But this will surely take much more time and security than the new state has had heretofore. One should not expect the state of Israel to be some sort of imminent messianic vanguard.

The entrance of religiously based philosophies into discussions of public policy offers the greatest political stimulus to Jewish belief. For it enables Jews to bring our tradition into the moral discussions that affect American society as a whole. We could not do that alone; we need allies. But since the vast majority of those advocating such philosophies are Christians, this will force many Jews who do not opt for either strict sectarian isolation (like that of Hasidism) or strict secularism to reevaluate their historical suspicion of Christianity. This can only be done when more and more Jews realize that the real danger to Jewish faith in America (and elsewhere) is the militant secularism that has utter contempt for just about everything Jewish tradition has ever taught, and that Christians are as much its victims as are Jews precisely because so much of their faith and morality is Jewish. As more Christians acknowledge that and fewer Christians resent it, Jews must respond accordingly.

The current ideological divisions within American Judaism disturb me because the voice of the Torah is usually lost in the debates they generate. On the one hand, too many in the liberal community (Reform and Conservative) seem to be determined to adjust the Torah to whatever is considered generally *au courant* in the class to which most of their members belong. Hence it is becoming harder and harder to see why their approach should any longer be called "Judaism." On the other hand, the Orthodox community seems to be distancing itself so far from all other Jews, and even eliminating many of its own moderates, that it is becoming harder and harder to see why its approach is not that of a minority sect rather than one for the Jewish "people" as a whole. It is to be hoped that a Jewish community will begin to emerge that will combine love of Torah and love of Jews in a cogent way.

Despite certain encouraging signs, especially qualitative and quantitative advances in Jewish education, I see little evidence for projecting a large-scale revival of Jews or Judaism in America. However, Jewish tradition is suspicious of even counting Jews. Every Jew is to consider himself or herself a whole world, responsible to God for all other Jews in the covenant. Whether there are many Jews or few, I believe that God never abandons His people (however much we suffer in this world). My only task as a Jew is to strengthen my faith and its commanded expression.

DAVID NOVAK *is the Edgar M. Bronfman professor of modern Judaic studies at the University of Virginia, and a vice president of the Union for Traditional Judaism.*

Joseph A. Polak

WE HAVE been transformed by the events of our century; we are no longer who we once were. Noah sees the world around him destroyed and is soon transformed from chaste occupant of the ark to naked carouser. Lot witnesses the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with similar consequences. The people Israel witness the drowning of the Egyptian army, and the sexual excesses of the Golden Calf episode are not far behind.

Note that the actual *view* of these catastrophes is in each case obstructed—the ark is windowless; Lot is proscribed from gazing at the destruction; at the sea, only Pharaoh's death is observed (according to at least one rabbinic commentary).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One does not need to *see* catastrophe to be witness to it, one needs merely to survive it, and in our own time, of course, all Jews are survivors.

So Isaac, the prototype for our generation, is the survivor *par excellence*. He too knows the knife has been raised, he has witnessed the terrible decree that overrides all covenants and human moral expectations. While his judgment appears impaired (consider his assessment of Esau), his faith in God, like most survivors who were religious before the catastrophe, is unshaken. After the *akedah*, the binding on the altar at Moriah, he becomes a holy man, yet a man with a shadow. As with many religious survivors, it is difficult to be in his presence because he is haunted by memories.

So it is with our generation. As we recall the furtive death-defying queues to don a sole pair of *tefillin* in the predawn blackness of Auschwitz, the joy of reviewing a *halakhic* teaching at mortal risk in the shoe factory of the Warsaw Ghetto, the shofar blowing, *at their request*, for the children already settled on Rosh Hashanah day on the floor of a gas chamber—we have no doubt as to Who was at our side.

We have not become atheists; the fire of Torah surely burns as brightly today as it did in the pre-Holocaust world. The commanding voice at Sinai did not merely take place in the past but was uttered in the eternal present of the divine, and was heard as deeply then as it is now. Revelation takes place each day in the oral and written traditions, in the text itself as in living its message, so long as we continue to search, like Rabbi Akiva Eger in the 19th century, and Rabbi Akiva twenty centuries before him, for what *precisely* it is that the commandment commands.

But Rabbi Akiva Eger did not have to contend with our immediate history, and it is here that we are as a nation transformed. Like Isaac, we are haunted by a memory, a shadow accompanies us wherever we go, and into each commandment we observe: *what about them?* What of the six million holy ones who were not privileged to be survivors? What are we to make of this, of this miracle that never took place, of what the religious philosopher Emil L. Fackenheim calls the anti-miracle?

Were we meant as a people to save ourselves? Is it that our destiny has been given over to us now, in greater measure than ever before? Is this what we are to make of mankind's new capacity, emerged from the splitting of the atom, for extinguishing the human race in its entirety; a capacity heretofore exclusively God's? Is this what gene manipulation is all about? Is this why, suddenly, the land of Israel is ours again?

And, like Noah and Lot, is our judgment impaired after the catastrophe? Does this explain Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's murderer? Does it explain rabbis who neglect unto death patients in their nursing homes or who sexually molest fellow passengers on an airplane? Does it resolve the paradox of people who call themselves observant yet beat their children to death or bilk those who trust them of millions?

"Blessed are You, God . . . Who has chosen us from all peoples, and given us His Torah. . . ." If He eludes us in history, and sometimes He does, we pursue Him in the Torah, from which He is never absent. It is for this task, says this ancient prayer, that we were chosen as a people; it is out of this text that we will learn, shadows and all, to be a light unto all peoples. And to the extent that we refuse to allow God to hide in the interstices of history, which we do through pursuing His voice in the text and in the observance of the commandment (and through never attempting to evade the shadow)—to this extent we succeed in exposing the messiah. And here and there, as we get a glimpse of him, the shadow retreats.

What are we to make, then, of so many Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews, whose rabbis, and much more whose laity, are denied in their education the skills that bring access to the text? There is a fire that burns in the heart of the Torah, access to which, as I have tried to show, is the *sine qua non* of Jewish personhood and peoplehood; yet this is a fire from which they are distanced and from whose warmth they can barely benefit. Put differently, if you ask one of these leaders why they do not observe, say, the Sabbath, their answer is inarticulate because for close to a hundred years they have been denied the skills *to see for themselves* why anyone *would*. Their replies are filled with words that are flotsam from a rebellion of another time, of another subject. And as their flanks hemorrhage before their own horrified eyes, they sometimes persist in repeating the old clichés, the scientific relativism of 19th-century ideologists and assimilationists. More frequently, they set what is trendy into a quasi-Judaic vocabulary and make that the basis for their Jewish practices.

They have thus not discovered (to cite one example) that teaching a woman to chant the musical notations of the Torah will not necessarily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teach her what is in it; nor will it teach her how to put Jewish children to bed—both being more likely to assure Jewish survival than the training of cantors of any gender. What it does do is sanction women's public performance in the synagogue, which constitutes exercising a "right" rather than engaging in the response to a divine command. Religion in these circles has in some measure been displaced by political theater even as Torah-study has been displaced by Torah-discussion.

From this perspective, then, there are only two movements in American Judaism: one with access to the Torah, the other without. The latter, insofar as its leadership in this sense is almost indistinguishable from its membership, is doomed to be relativized out of meaningful Jewish life, and for the most part, this is what the statistics of American Jewish demographers are reporting.

The movement of those with Torah knowledge, however haunted and morally tortured, is growing by leaps and bounds, but not at a rate that makes up for the losses of the others; not just for numerical reasons, but because the loss of even a single one of these Jews is a loss to ignorance, and that in itself is unconscionable.

JOSEPH A. POLAK *is associate chairman of the* halakhah *committee of the rabbinical court of Massachusetts, and Hillel rabbi to the Jewish community at Boston University.*

Dennis Prager

I BELIEVE IN God, the God of the Bible. This God is good, holy, supranatural, personal. As good and holy are self-explanatory, I will briefly explain supranatural and personal.

Supranatural: God created nature and is in no way part of it. All movements—from Spinoza to Mordecai M. Kaplan to contemporary nature adulation—that place God within nature are forms of *avodah zarah*, idol worship. The greatest single purpose of Torah teaching is *to separate God from nature*—hence, for example, Genesis begins with God creating nature.

Personal: God knows each of us. If God did not know us, there would be no practical difference between atheism and belief.

I believe that the Torah is divinely revealed. This does not necessarily mean that every word is divinely dictated, but I treat the Torah as if it were. The Torah is not merely "the Jewish people's search for God" or anything else that places the Jews, rather than God, at its origin.

I accept the binding nature of the Torah's values, but not of all the rabbis' laws. God is God, rabbis are human. Therefore, for example, I observe each of the Torah's festivals, but do not observe the second day added to each one by the rabbis—it is irrational and it contravenes the Torah; the Torah specifies the number of days for each holiday, and it prohibits adding to or subtracting from its laws. I also use musical instruments on the Sabbath to make religious music, just as the Psalms directed us, but which the rabbis later prohibited.

If I did not believe that the Jews were chosen by God, I would not raise my children as Jews. To bequeath the suffering that may attend being Jewish to my descendants is defensible only if we have a divine calling. And since a good Christian can lead as good and holy a life as a good Jew, I see few compelling reasons to stay Jewish if we are not God's messengers.

Being a messenger is what chosenness is about. We are here to bring the world to ethical monotheism, i.e., the one God and His one universal moral law. Few Jews, tragically, believe in this religious mission to the world: most religious Jews ignore the world, and most Jews who talk to the world ignore Judaism.

Bringing the world to ethical monotheism *ought* to be the distinctive role of the Jewish people. In reality, however, perhaps the most distinctive role that many secular Jews play in the modern era is working to overthrow Judeo-Christian civilization, the closest thing we have to ethical monotheism. Examples include those Jews who embraced Marxism, or those Jews today who toil to undo the mother-father-based family (through advocating same-sex marriage, removing the stigma from single motherhood, etc.) and to replace God-based ethics with "every man doing what he thinks is right in his own eyes" (Deuteronomy 12:8).

Jewish messianism has caused more problems than it has solved. Let God bring the messiah in His good time. In the meantime, I have to worry about genocide in Rwanda, about children being taken away from loving homes and given to abusive birth parents, and about the gender confusion being foisted upon the next generation by the elite of the present generation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Holocaust only confirms for me what I learned in yeshiva, that people are not basically good, and that those who hate the message from Sinai will hate the messengers from Sinai.

The state of Israel, on the other hand, had a profoundly positive impact on my Judaism. It enabled one young Jew, born three years after the Holocaust, to stand tall as a secure Jew. As a Jewish adult, however, I no longer rely on Israel for my Jewish strength; I get it from Judaism.

The greatest stimulus to my Jewish belief is the present decline of America (and the West generally) emanating from its abandonment of God. Once-great universities no longer seek truth, or even believe truth exists. Once-great museums now offer displays of men urinating in other men's mouths and "art works" made of menstrual blood. We have gone from the God-touching music of Johann Sebastian Bach to the anus-touching art of Robert Mapplethorpe, and from seeking truth to deconstructionism—all because, as the Psalms put it, "Wisdom begins with fear of God." No fear of God, no wisdom.

Thus, I came to my passionate beliefs in God and Judaism primarily because I have seen the abyss to which the alternative, secularism, leads.

I look to the denominations for their many excellent schools and summer camps, and for their many fine rabbis and cantors. But when it comes to leading a religious Jewish life in the modern world, the denominations have little to teach. And what they do teach is on occasion quite distant from the Torah as I understand it.

For example, what is one to make of Reform Judaism's calling upon society to redefine marriage? Judaism fought against the world to channel the human sexual drive, which is naturally bisexual rather than exclusively heterosexual, into heterosexual, monogamous marriage—and Reform rabbis, in a voice vote in Philadelphia, vote to reject this awesome value and accomplishment. Meanwhile, at the other end of the denominational spectrum is a denomination in which fear of the *frum* (observant) often determines religious practice more than fear of God; in which women can be told to live alone until they die because their husband will not grant them a divorce; in which congregants read every Friday night that women who die in childbirth do so because they did not observe proper customs concerning the hallah (the Sabbath bread) or the laws of *niddah* (sexual purity) or Sabbath candle-lighting.

I do not call for Jewish religious unity because anyone who calls for unity really means, "Unite around my beliefs." Instead, I work to make Jews serious Jews. By this I mean becoming learned in Judaism, using Judaism as the basis of their value system, and practicing essential Jewish ethical and ritual laws. Serious Jews do not have to be entirely unified; there are a number (though not an infinite number) of roads to God inside, as well as outside, Judaism.

A large-scale revival of Judaism in America would be possible under two conditions: the rise of a widespread and passionate non-Orthodox religiosity and/or widespread Jewish hunger for God and Judaism. I see little chance of the former, as Reform, for example, still tends to equate Judaism with social activism and to redefine God in terms of whatever is acceptable to the post-modern, secular, egalitarian mind. And there is little hunger for Judaism because most Jews are already deeply committed to another religion, one that is aggressively secular and man-centered—liberalism.

The only other possibility of a large-scale revival of Judaism is large-scale conversion of non-Jews to Judaism. It is unlikely, but it may actually be more feasible than a large-scale revival among born-Jews. There are millions of nonreligious God-seeking non-Jews whose lives are not given meaning by liberal politics and who would be receptive to the beauty and profundity of Judaism.

The commitment of secular Jews to liberalism was exemplified earlier this year in Tennessee, where the state Senate voted 27 to 1 to urge—not legislate, just urge—the citizens of Tennessee to post the Ten Commandments in their homes, businesses, and schools. Guess who the one dissenter was? A man named Steve Cohen, the only Jew in the Tennessee Senate.

The Jews gave the world the Ten Commandments, and with the same fervor that we gave them, many Jews work to remove them. This does not bode well for a large-scale revival of Judaism. It does bode well, however, for a large-scale revival of nihilism—which is already well under way.

DENNIS PRAGER *writes a bi-monthly newsletter,* The Prager Perspective. *His most recent book is* Think a Second Time, *a collection of 43 essays on contemporary issues, and he is co-author of* The Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism. *He conducts a daily three-hour talk show on KABC radio in Los Angeles.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Richard L. Rubenstein

AS I INDICATED in the 1966 COMMENTARY symposium, I believe in God as the Holy Nothingness, the Ground of all existence, the Source out of which we come and to which we ultimately return. This is a very old conception of God with deep roots in Western and Oriental mysticism and some affinity to certain forms of Buddhism. To speak of God as the Holy Nothingness, *Das Heilige Nichts*, the *En Sof* of Kabbalah, is to assert that God is beyond all limitation and finite "thinghood." Such imperfect language is not meant to suggest that God is a void. On the contrary, the Holy Nothingness is a *plenum* so rich that all existence derives therefrom.

Perhaps the best available metaphor for this conception is to liken God to the ocean, and all discrete existing beings to the waves. Each wave has its moment of partially identifiable existence, but there is ultimately no separation between the waves and their oceanic substratum. Hence, each wave is destined to return to and be wholly absorbed by its oceanic ground.

I believe the entire Torah to be the "inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (Deuteronomy 33:4). It is sacred by virtue of its role in Jewish history, but it is not divinely revealed in any meaningful literal sense. The Torah is the uniquely authoritative document out of which the entire corpus of Jewish religious belief and practice has been and will continue to be derived by future generations. I accept the binding nature of *all* of the commandments. They embody the collective wisdom of Israel's prophets and teachers throughout history. Nevertheless, there is at present no group within the Jewish community possessed of the universally recognized authority to define or compel religious compliance. And that is as it should be! As in 1966, I believe that the wisest course is to recognize *both* the binding character of all of the commandments and the voluntary character of our response to them.

In no sense do I believe that Jews or any other people are the chosen of God, nor do I believe the Jewish people has a more distinctive role in the world than any other. We are, however, "a people that dwelleth alone" (Numbers 23:9), unlike any other, for no other people has had our distinctive historical experience. Some of what we have learned may be instructive to others, but there is nothing theologically or morally privileged about our experience or the values that derive from it. Nevertheless, I regularly utter Hebrew prayers praising God for having chosen Israel, for there is no way to excise references to the election of Israel from the prayer book without destroying its integrity and authenticity.

Jewish messianism offers consolation and hope in the face of catastrophe. Unfortunately, it also offers a program which, if implemented, could lead to further catastrophe. Jewish messianists believe the world's redemption depends upon the resettlement of the "whole" land of Israel and the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. The latter objective could only be accomplished by destroying the mosques on the Temple Mount, Islam's most sacred space after Mecca and Medina. The inflamed Muslim response would be swift and calamitous. Unfortunately, like the ancient Zealots, our radical messianists are convinced that God is on their side and they are undeterred by the possibility of a large-scale holy war.

No event during my lifetime has had a greater impact upon me than the Holocaust. Although I was born in the United States to American-born parents, absent the Holocaust it is highly unlikely that I would have entered upon the serious study of Judaism as a vocation. The contrast between the liberal faith in enlightenment and progress in which I was nurtured and the gruesome history of the 20th century was too great to ignore. My first book was entitled *After Auschwitz*. It was fundamentally an attempt to explore the religious implications of the Holocaust at a time when almost all postwar expressions of Jewish theology ignored the two most decisive events in modern Jewish history, the Holocaust and the birth of Israel.

Although there appears to be general agreement that the debate over Holocaust theology was initiated with the publication of *After Auschwitz*, my views on God and the Holocaust were with some justice considered outside the normative Jewish mainstream. These views were briefly expressed in the 1966 COMMENTARY symposium where I stated:

> How can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz? Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate, omnipotent actor in the historical drama. It has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how that position can be maintained without regard-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> ing Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. . . . To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, antihuman explosion in all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. That is simply too obscene for me to accept.

I remain committed to these views. Although I hold my theological contemporaries in high esteem, I have never regarded as persuasive their attempts to reduce the dissonance between normative Jewish faith and 20th-century Jewish history.

As a result of my more recent Holocaust research, I have moved closer to the Orthodox view of the place of Jews and Judaism in European civilization. Traditional religious leaders always regarded our people as strangers and sojourners there. They understood that Europe never valued religious diversity. Whenever a group arose that was perceived to be a threat to European Christendom, such as the Muslims and the Cathars of 13th-century France, they were eventually eliminated from the continent. History shows that in spite of our long European domicile, Jews, no matter how "assimilated," never ceased to be regarded as alien.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Jewish presence became intolerable to important European religious and political elites who regarded Bolshevism as a Jewish assault on Christendom. There may be some regret in contemporary Germany and Eastern Europe about the method of riddance, but little, if any, grief that Jews have ceased to be a significant presence. Neither the pre-Vatican II Catholic Church nor the German Protestant Church had looked with favor upon the emancipation of the Jews and the rise of a class of Jewish writers, thinkers, intellectuals, and academics who for a time were able to influence European Christendom from within. As in the case of the Cathars, it was only a question of time before the highly popular objective of eliminating the Jews was achieved.

Although never proclaimed as such, the Holocaust bore more than a little resemblance to a holy war in which the neo-pagan Nazis did the dirty work for institutions that were destined to outlast them. Admittedly, some Christians rescued Jews at great risk to themselves, but, while morally significant, the number rescued was statistically insignificant. Far from representing a break with the values of European civilization, the Holocaust reveals the extremes to which that civilization was prepared to go to defend what it considered to be the integrity of its religio-cultural inheritance. With Bosnia in mind, I sometimes wonder whether Europe's Muslims may some day experience a repetition of 1492.

I believe the Holocaust still constitutes the greatest single challenge to Jewish belief *and* continuity. After Auschwitz, I am hardly alone in finding it difficult to utter prayers praising God as a merciful and compassionate Redeemer. The Holocaust also confronts every Jew with the question: "Is Judaism any longer worth dying for?" Convinced Orthodox Jews have no trouble giving an affirmative response. Jews who marry non-Jews and raise their children as Christians or without religious commitment give another. We tend to underestimate the continuing impact of the Holocaust in fostering not only intermarriage but other avenues of escape from Judaism.

The current denominational and ideological differences within American Judaism are unavoidable. Given the differences in education, class, and background, it would be impossible for one size to fit all. With the rise of a militant Orthodoxy in both the United States and Israel, the differences are bound to increase. It is theologically difficult, if not impossible, for the Orthodox to accord full legitimacy to Reform and Conservative Judaism. As the number of intermarriages increases, the problem worsens. The Jewish community could be heading toward a very real split between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox, with very few marriages taking place between them. I regret this development but I see no viable solution.

With so large a proportion of American Jews intermarrying, I see no prospect of a large-scale revival.

RICHARD L. RUBENSTEIN *is president of the University of Bridgeport. His most recent book is a revised and enlarged edition of* After Auschwitz *published by Johns Hopkins University Press.*

Ismar Schorsch

DESPITE THE approach of the millennium, history and science conspire to shrink the significance of human life. Whatever else our

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

century will be known for, it will surely be recalled for inventing the crime of genocide, discovering a cosmos of unimaginable size, and confirming the randomness at the heart of Darwinian evolution. And yet, I avow and live my people's ancient and oft-tested faith in the existence of God.

I do so because the concept of monotheism as forged by the prophets, rabbis, and mystics of Judaism is consistently grand and expansive and without any confining concreteness. When I pray, my mind is devoid of divine images, as are our synagogues. On the verse in Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," the rabbis struck the following analogy: "David beckoned the soul, which is beyond human ken and whose location is unknown, to praise God Who is beyond the world and whose location is unknown."

I like the poetry of this homily because it alludes to the link between the human and the divine. Though our mind is humbled by the grandeur of God, our soul feels drawn to God's presence. The religious impulse springs from an affinity of being. We are more than what we seem, bearing within us a godly spark ever yearning to repair the rupture that comes with birth. In the words of the 11th-century Spanish Hebrew poet Isaac Ibn Ghiyath (translated by Raymond P. Scheindlin):

> I sought You out and found You in my thoughts:
> My heart has eyes within that let me see.
> The soul You breathed in me clings to Your throne,
> though it resides in a battered, aching clod.

For me, God is both transcendent and immanent, incomprehensible and knowable. Ignorance does not deprive me of a sense of relationship. God is a verb and not a noun, an ineffable presence that graces my life with a daily touch of eternity. I have no doubt that the Sabbath is a foretaste of the world-to-come. The holy is found through the medium of community and commandments.

I deem the Torah to be the grand record of the initial and formative dialogue between God and Israel, a book that sparkles with the intensity of ongoing religious experience. Its legal core, set in an exquisite narrative framework, repudiated the values and beliefs of the ancient world even as it borrowed heavily from them. What ultimately made it sacred and binding was its public acceptance at the time of Ezra (and often thereafter). Not for nothing did the rabbis regard him as the equal of Moses.

As a Conservative Jew, I live the Judaism fashioned out of the Bible by the rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia from the 1st to the 6th centuries. While they turned the Torah into the foundation text of Judaism, as symbolized by its central role in the synagogue, they did not hesitate to modify, expand, and even abrogate it through interpretation. In the process they achieved the paradox of a canon without closure, a dynamic exegetical culture marked by equal amounts of reverence and responsiveness. The dialogue between God and Israel animates the ferment of rabbinic literature.

If I have departed from rabbinic Judaism, it is in being more circumspect about my ability to detect the hand of God in history. The black hole of the Holocaust has blurred my vision. Theologically I take refuge in the daring mythic tropes of Lurianic Kabbalah after the expulsions of the 15th century, which add up to the concept of a self-limiting God. I am numbed by the human capacity to do evil and the divine reluctance to save us from ourselves. According to the Kotzker *rebbe*, humankind was put on earth to keep the heavens aloft. When we fail, creation remains unfinished.

Jewish messianism aims at conquering the heart, not the land. The Torah offers a regimen for curbing our passions, a prescription for this-worldly salvation. The land is instrumental: a venue for converting moral theory into public policy and personal behavior. As long as the heart is "devious" and "perverse" (Jeremiah 17:9), lasting victory will elude us. Soberly, Ezekiel and Jeremiah envision a second covenant that will enhance our prospects for peace and justice by inscribing the Torah directly on our hearts.

Nevertheless, I celebrate the rebirth of a democratic and dynamic Israel and revel in the revival of Hebrew. Equally unprecedented, both achievements have placed Israel at the center of Jewish pride, healing, and unity after the Holocaust. For it to stay there, it must not become the exclusive preserve of sectarian interests. The time has come to reaffirm that Israel belongs to all Jews, whether secular or religious, Reform or Orthodox.

Religious pluralism is the inescapable byproduct of emancipation and modernity. No amount of coercion will restore the alleged uniformity and concord of the ghetto. Theologically, I be-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lieve that Conservative Judaism is heir to the mantle of rabbinic Judaism. But, sociologically, I know that only a variety of choices will affect the chaos of individual freedom. It is the absence of religious diversity that dooms most Israelis to remain stridently secular.

In an open society, faith cannot be forced. It will flourish only if implanted and nurtured through a supreme effort at quality Jewish education. For all the differences between Israeli and American Jews, we face the same precipitous erosion in Jewish identity. We need to forge a partnership on a grand scale to revitalize our transmission in both societies of the scope, depth, and intensity of our common religious culture. Only then will our children share the pride, moral compass, and medium of expression to live their lives Jewishly.

ISMAR SCHORSCH *is the chancellor and Rabbi Herman Abramovitz professor of Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (Conservative). His most recent book is* From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism *(University Press of New England).*

David Singer

THIRTY YEARS ago, when COMMENTARY conducted its now-historic symposium on "The State of Jewish Belief," the Orthodox participants were comfortable in their modernity, but at pains to justify their Orthodoxy. In 1996, for me at least, the situation is exactly the reverse: my Orthodoxy is rock solid, but I am hard-pressed to justify any accommodation with modernity. Modernity means secularism, and secularism has wrought havoc with Jewish commitment and belief. As long as the "acids of modernity" continue to eat away at the core structures of Jewish life, Judaism will remain in crisis.

About my Orthodoxy, what is there to say? I was blessed with parents who provided me with Orthodox schooling from the first grade through college. This is indispensable. Also vital, however, is the fact that God, in His grace, has given me the capacity to believe, to hear His commanding voice as it speaks in Torah and Jewish tradition. I can thus affirm without hesitation that the Torah is the record of God's revelation to the Jewish people, and that every word of Torah is holy, true, and binding. It is in obedience to Torah that Jews give expression to their chosenness, even as they await the coming of the messiah.

What distinguishes Orthodoxy as a religious way is its adherents' powerful sense of living in a commanded mode. The line of authority is clear: God issues the marching orders and man obeys. About these marching orders there is nothing at all vague—we are talking about law, law that encompasses the whole of life and is sharply focused on detail. As for obedience, it entails an urgent feeling of obligation, in which the sole criterion of significance is the will of God. Ludicrous though it may seem to others, for the committed Orthodox Jew, not tearing toilet paper on the Sabbath is a serious religious issue.

Orthodoxy has staying power because it generates an intricate web of behavior and a powerful sense of community. The two together create a separatist dynamic that has a physical as well as a psychological component. Academic scholars tend to focus on the former, but it is the latter that is most consequential. At every turn, the Orthodox Jew is made aware that he is different, that he is governed by a set of behavioral norms which find no echo in the larger society. This holds true for the Orthodox student on the Ivy League campus no less than for the Hasid in Williamsburg. An Orthodox Jew may be a successful professional, living in an affluent suburb and immersed in the pleasures of American life, yet he can never shake his sense of otherness.

Separatism is anathema to the vast majority of American Jews, but it remains a fact that without a heavy dose of it there can be no Jewish survival. This is especially true in an open, tolerant society like the United States, where Jews are less threatened with anti-Semitism than with being hugged to death by the Gentiles. I will leave it to rabbis to debate theology; from my point of view, the key failing of Conservative and Reform Judaism is in making insufficient allowance for a separatist dimension. Indeed, these movements, together with Reconstructionism and Havurah Judaism, consciously strive for maximum integration into the larger society. One can fully understand the impulse that is at work here, but it is nonetheless a formula for Jewish disaster.

American Jews talk endlessly abut Jewish con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tinuity, but few outside of Orthodoxy are willing to take the steps necessary to make it a reality. The basic ingredient, most certainly, is day-school education, which should be considered a given from the elementary level through high school. (It never ceases to amaze me that parents who turn somersaults to give their children a top-notch general education almost always settle for fourth-rate Jewish supplementary schooling.) Also crucial in this context is a significant commitment to synagogue life, with parents providing a serious model of religious observance. Then again, there is an obvious need for summer camps with solid Jewish content, plus meaningful trips to Israel, plus college experiences that allow for serious Jewish expression. All this is clear-cut; it is merely a matter of will.

But it is precisely the absence of will that is the most striking feature of the current Jewish survival scene. Here one sees the corrosive impact of secularization, which has left the majority of American Jews with an enfeebled sense of Jewishness. If "enfeebled" seems too loaded a term, consider the following: most American Jews do not belong to a synagogue; at any given time, most American Jewish children receive no Jewish education; most American Jews cannot read Hebrew; most American Jews have never been to Israel; and—of greatest consequence—most American Jews at present marry out of the faith. Need I go on?

Secularism is an idol that demands endless sacrifices of Jewish commitment and belief. In return, it holds forth the promise of Jewish engagement with the world of elite culture. But what kind of culture is this? Whatever it may have represented in the past, by now it largely consists of a poisonous mix of relativism, subjectivism, and outright nihilism. Should a Jew give up kosher food for a diet of Michel Foucault? Should a Jew trade in the Babylonian Talmud for a shelf of deconstructionism? Should a Jew pass up Sabbath warmth for a coffee-table edition of Robert Mapplethorpe's pornographic photographs? It was Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage; one might expect better of the descendants of Jacob.

The need of the hour is to recognize that the community of faithful Jews is small, and that there is no easy way out of this situation. Secularization is a massive fact, a massive reality that cannot be swept away by means of a quick fix. If there is to be a "return" (*teshuvah*) in the classic sense, Jews—one by one—will have to find a way to cross the bridge from nonfaith to faith in Torah. Certainly this is a process that can be nurtured, and active steps should be taken to help it along. But in the final analysis, one can only fall back on God's grace—the biblical promise that the Jews will ultimately return to God.

DAVID SINGER *is editor of the* American Jewish Year Book.

Devora Steinmetz

IT SEEMS to me that there is, at the present time, both too much emphasis on statements of belief and not enough discussion about the meaning of those beliefs or their significance for shaping a religious life. Simply to say that one believes in God, or does not, that Torah is divine revelation, or is not, that Jews are God's chosen people, or are not, and that one awaits the messiah, or does not—these are fairly meaningless generalities which, unfortunately, become measures of one's religious identity, community, and affiliation.

Each of these questions raises important theological issues; no doubt, thoughtful and ongoing discussion of them from earliest childhood throughout adulthood would lead to a richer religious life. Instead, we are often bequeathed simple answers by our communities and religious leaders; these answers tend to define the boundaries of our religious identities and affiliations, thus both fragmenting the larger Jewish community and stifling personal and communal religious growth.

Because of this, despite my conviction that such questions are important, I would rather focus at the present time on that which we share and by means of which we grow. What we share, of course, is a library of ancient books, and that is what Jews have always shared. The texts before us precede any questions of how they came to us. As a teacher, I have sat with students of all denominations and discussed, argued, pondered, and struggled with questions of interpretation and meaning. What we all share is the conviction that these texts are central to our identity as Jews, that study of these texts is important, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that there is meaning to be found by seeking it in these texts.

What we experience when we study Torah together is community, commitment, religious growth, and transcendence; we partake of an activity which joins us together with each other and with all Jews across time and space. Torah study dissolves boundaries, not because it leads to consensus, but because it highlights what we share. Our very disagreements become the stuff of shared experience; our shared experience is the vehicle of individual and communal growth.

We live in a society which celebrates diversity and choice. Most of us have adopted secular values of personal freedom and open inquiry. These values offer both the greatest challenge and, potentially, the greatest stimulus to Jewish life. While the rise of denominations may once have offered the kind of diversity and creativity essential for the health of religious life in an open society, I believe that denominational structures currently limit more than they stimulate individual and communal growth. Boundaries have been carefully drawn, and Jews and Jewish institutions are expected to wear labels and to conform to the ideas and practices which those labels suggest. But it makes no sense, in our society, narrowly to limit choice in religious belief or way of life. Nor is such limitedness authentic to Jewish tradition, which both includes a great variety of different ideas and interpretations and also celebrates dialectic and diverse opinions.

Most of us are exposed only to a narrow slice of the ideas and interpretations which Judaism has incorporated. We are told what to believe and what to deem important, but we are not captivated by the complexity, mystery, and infinite possibility of Torah. The limited Torah with which we are presented is untrue to the tradition, it runs counter to our valuing of diversity and choice in the rest of our lives, it leaves little to captivate those Jews to whom the language of *a priori* commitment does not speak, and, for those who do accept it, it gives predetermined answers rather than posing the questions which challenge us to grow, to deepen our commitment, and to find new understandings which will enrich our communities.

And so, leaving theology aside for the moment, I will speak the language of symbol and meaning. Whatever God is or is not, awareness of God means to me the awareness that there is something larger than the tiny bit of reality which I experience, and that there is something beyond the present, that the past is not forgotten, that the future must be kept in mind. I am chosen if I believe that I have a calling; the language of chosenness tells me that I have responsibilities and that my life is not lived properly if I do not work to clarify and fulfill my calling. Messianism reminds us that the bleakest reality must never obscure our responsibility to believe in and work for a better world. Israel, the promised land of the Bible as well as the modern state, challenges us to bring our vision of the ideal into the real world, despite the recognition that the realities of human existence limit our capacity to fulfill the dream; we can and must envision the promised land, even though we can never truly reach it. Revelation, too, at once beckons me to seek truth and reminds me that the truth which I or any person sees is limited by human experience; as a seeker of truth, therefore, I must be audacious enough to believe that I can hear God's word and humble enough to recognize that my understanding is limited by my situatedness in this time and place.

In short, we are commanded beings with jobs to do. And, while no one of us can ever have the whole truth, we may neither conclude that every path is right nor refrain from seeking the path which seems most true. The challenge which we are called upon to meet is to construct meaning and purposeful living from an honest and authentic encounter between contemporary reality and values and our Jewish tradition, in its full complexity and richness.

There are those who rewrite Judaism into secular language to the point where it becomes familiar and comfortable but loses its distinctiveness; they live secular lives adorned with attractive Jewish symbols and rituals. Others reject secular values and modern ideas; they attempt to live as they believe Jews have always lived before them, but with the external trappings of modern life. Still others split their lives, adhering to the practices and beliefs which they are taught yet embracing often conflicting secular beliefs and ways of living in areas which they do not perceive to be the domain of religion.

None of these approaches, to my mind, offers the path to a meaningful religious life. Our rootedness in an ancient and dynamic tradition asks us always to bring a different and a broader perspective to our contemporary lives and to the conventions, values, and ideas which we take for granted. Honest, deep study and reflection ought to lead us to awareness of what our two

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heritages share and where they diverge. The dissonance between them ought to enlarge our perspective; each should be a lens through which we critically examine our worlds and determine what will be our individual and communal missions. We live with two distinct and sometimes conflicting stories and value-systems; the dialectic between them can lead to creativity and wide-awakeness, in place of the stagnation and complacency which are antithetical to religious life.

God, chosenness, messiah, Israel, revelation—these are ideas which, despite different beliefs about them, must call us to study, reflection, action, identity, and community. They will do that most effectively if we lay aside currently divisive statements about what Jews believe and start instead with the adventure which we share. We are living in a time when individualism and personal freedom are leading to a search for community and shared meaning. This search can bring about Jewish revival only if more and more Jews are drawn into and captivated by the world of authentic Torah study in its complexity, difficulty, richness, and diversity.

When we develop a deep relationship with Torah and with each other, differences and disputes will be seen as evidence of vibrancy and growth rather than of divisiveness. Then, when our relationship with Torah and with each other has matured enough to weather difficulty and discord, and when we have begun to construct rich religious lives, we can turn to eternal questions of belief productively and openly.

DEVORA STEINMETZ *is the founder and director of Beit Rabban, a nondenominational day school and center for research in Jewish education.*

Suzanne Last Stone

I BELIEVE THAT the experience of Sinai established the authority of the Torah, both written and oral, for the community of Israel, including all later generations of Jews. Because I accept the authority of the Torah, I am obligated to believe in God, in the traditional teaching that the Torah is from heaven, and in the binding nature of all the commandments. As Maimonides classified it, belief in God is a positive commandment of the Torah and a proper subject of prescription. I infer from this that belief in God is not solely a matter of faith or personal religious insight, and therefore need not be confined to those who have been granted the gift of a religious personality. Rather, belief can in part be willed and is conditioned by religious practice.

The precise nature of divine revelation can be understood in a wide variety of ways, as rabbinic sources attest. The crucial point for me is that Sinai initiated the oral-law tradition and that the content of divine revelation can only be known through, and determined by, that tradition. In the course of its history, this tradition has grown dramatically as it has responded to changed conditions and new modes of thought. Nonetheless, a cornerstone of the *halakhic* system is that laws determined to be based in divine origin cannot be abrogated. As such, the system is in tension with the contemporary idea that everything, whether laws, beliefs, or human nature itself, is subject to revision and change. Because my allegiance to the conceptual world of the *halakhah* is primary, I believe that I am obligated to evaluate present sensibilities in light of its assumptions and principles and not the reverse.

The *halakhah* is the specific, normative formulation of ethical, philosophic, historic, and religious ideals, but it is not reducible to them. Although the oral-law tradition itself explores the nature of the commandments, identifying some as rational and others as nonrational, all the commandments are deemed equally binding because of their source in divine revelation. Whatever my own level of observance, I can identify no intellectual basis for creating a hierarchy of commandments—except to the extent recognized by the *halakhah* itself—or for singling out for observance those which at present can be explained on ethical or social grounds.

In classical Jewish sources, chosenness is defined in terms of the giving of the Torah, which commands that Israel become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. According to one rabbinic commentary, God chose the Jews and threatened to bury them under the mountain of Sinai if they did not accept the Torah. According to another, the people of Israel, unlike all other nations, voluntarily chose to commit themselves to the Torah. The first implies that the very existence of a distinct Jewish nation is dependent on adherence to the Torah. The second invites ex-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ploration of the particular characteristics that enabled an already constituted group to submit to the obligations of the Torah. On either reading, the concept of chosenness has historically been a focus of self-definition; and in either case I believe that the distinctive role of the Jewish people, now as in the past, is to observe the commandments and, through their performance, to advance the religious and social goals of the Torah.

The Torah addresses Jews directly and also, through the Noahide laws, humanity. Thus, Jews have distinct obligations, defined by the Torah, not only to God and their fellow Jews but also to the world at large. They have a duty to promote a just social order and to promulgate those aspects of the Torah that have universal application. But I regard as a serious distortion the still-prevalent idea that Jews were chosen to pursue a particular political agenda, or that the great figures of Israel's past, especially the prophets, are significant only insofar as they serve as role models for modern-day social activists.

As for Jewish messianism, a complex topic, I view this theme as primarily a means of motivating communal behavior in the present, not as focusing on the spiritual qualities of a single, identifiable individual.

My religious identity and observance, if not my faith, have been tremendously strengthened by the fact of the Holocaust. To me, as a child of European parents and grandparents who experienced some of its horrors, and who emerged with a profound sense of joy at having been able to observe most of Jewish law even while hiding, it is inconceivable that I, who live at a time when it is extraordinarily easy to remain an observant Jew, should either break the chain of tradition or fail to communicate to my children the joyous aspects of observance. From the perspective of faith, I do not view the Holocaust as presenting a challenge to Jewish belief qualitatively different in kind from that posed by prior catastrophes.

In contrast to the Holocaust, the overriding theme of which is the absence or God, the existence of the state of Israel in the face of great odds and the dramatic ingathering of exiles have provided me with a sense of the hand of God acting in history. Yet the manner in which American Jewry focuses its energy on advancing Zionism and memorializing the Holocaust—treating both as having paramount meaning in Jewish life, completely divorced from Jewish tradition and practice—threatens to deflect attention from the main goal: to perpetuate Jewish spiritual, and not solely physical, continuity.

America is an extraordinarily friendly environment for Jews, offering enormous opportunities to become both prosperous and politically and socially prominent. Jewish continuity is furthered to the extent that Jews seize this opportunity to pursue their own legitimate, particularist agenda and beliefs. At the same time, Jewish continuity is threatened by the ease with which Jews may assimilate into American society at the highest level. Jews in America tend to believe that these two paths—the promotion of Jewish tradition and a high level of achievement within American society—are mutually exclusive. This assumption may once have been accurate, but the increasing number of committed and observant Jews in positions of prominence shows that it is no longer the case. Recognition of this new reality holds out the greatest hope for Jewish continuity in America over the long run.

Even though I am extremely troubled by the deep divisions among American Jewry, it is not the lack of religious unity *per se* that concerns me. I am concerned, instead, that a majority of identified Jews in America are under the umbrella of Jewish denominational bodies which, in my opinion, cannot perpetuate themselves. First, the level of ignorance of classical Jewish sources within these bodies is, if not unprecedented in Jewish society, certainly unprecedented among those who take it upon themselves to declare the response of Judaism to the complexity of contemporary life. Second, in the final analysis, I do not believe a movement which denies the authority of the *halakhah* will survive over time as a Jewish movement.

Unless there is a profound change in the commitment of the liberal denominational movements to a Torah education and observance of the *halakhic* tradition, I do not see any prospect of a large-scale revival of Judaism out of what is, at present, the largest segment of the American Jewish population. I hope there will be an increasing number of thoughtful people who jump the fence toward more traditional Jewish institutional life. As a matter of demographics, there already has been a profound revival of Judaism among the most traditional element, and given the extremely high continuity rate in those circles and their rate of procreation, one can anticipate geometric growth in the ranks of the most strongly committed. I suspect that, over time,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this will become the dominant strain in American Judaism.

SUZANNE LAST STONE *is professor of law at Cardozo Law School, Yeshiva University. Her articles on comparative Jewish and American legal theory and on Jewish law and literature have appeared in the* Harvard Law Review *and other journals.*

David A. Teutsch

IT HAS been said that Jews can be divided into two groups—those who believe that the world is unlikely to change very much (non-messianists) and those who believe that the world can move toward perfection (messianists). I count myself among the messianists even though I certainly do not believe in a personal messiah. A key part of my abiding faith is that human beings are capable of improving ourselves and our world. Jewish tradition's demand that we improve ourselves and our world speaks powerfully to me, as do the opportunities Jewish living provides to celebrate our highest values and the full meaning of life.

The Torah presents the record of the earliest efforts of the Jewish people to discover the divine in human history and shape our shared life in light of the divine. Thus the Torah reflects both its historical context and profound insights into moral and spiritual truth. The shared communal life that has developed out of Jewish interpretations of Torah embodies the moral and spiritual tasks that have long been central to the Jewish people's commitments.

I believe that Mordecai M. Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionism, was right when he said that one of the unique characteristics of the Jewish people is our concern with what has ultimate importance in human life. The *mitzvah* system leads to an awareness of the transcendent value in human life and guides us to living in a moral and spiritual fashion that has redemptive power not only for us as individuals, but for us as a collective. Those actions recommended by Jewish tradition—both old and new—which achieve that end are truly *mitzvot*. Those parts which are only historically bound or out of keeping with the best values and practices of our time are no longer *mitzvot*.

Central to our struggle as Jews is the obligation to distinguish those parts of our inherited tradition that continue to have meaning from those that do not. This struggle can only take place authentically in the context of Jewish community, which provides the essential experiences that shape our inheritance of Judaism, our consciousness, and our intuition. It is the community that provides a sense of continuity and the fundamental context for the development of Jewish identity. It is also the community that as a collective can point toward the divine and make moral and spiritual demands upon its members.

I very much feel the presence of the divine in nature, in community, and in the workings of my own heart. It is up to us to seek God, however, because God is not a divine person Who intrudes in our life or makes individual decisions, but rather the unifying dimension of our reality that is the ground of meaning and morality.

If indeed we are seekers of the divine, then it is also up to us—and to other peoples as well—to choose God. God is not one Who chooses. Therefore, I do not believe it is sensible to talk about Jews as the chosen people. Aside from the theological problem chosenness presents, it raises a fundamental moral problem of triumphalism and competition. The Jewish people has a unique role and purpose that grows out of our historical experience and our struggle to make the divine manifest. Other peoples also have their unique place in the world. It is up to us to fulfill our own destiny just as it is up to other peoples to fulfill theirs.

As one who grew up in a home deeply affected by my parents' refugee status and German background, I must of course acknowledge that the Holocaust has had an impact on me. But that has not been critical in determining my observance or identity as a Jew. Rather, it has deepened the demand I make upon myself for rigorous moral action, and the passion with which I believe each of us has a solemn obligation to make moral demands on the people around us. The state of Israel has undoubtedly been an important factor in my identification with the Jewish people. I have spent extensive time there both studying and exploring. It is hard for me to imagine what it would have been like to grow up as a Jew without the state of Israel. In our time, it is the source not only of immersion in Hebrew language and Jewish geography; it is also a source of pride and identity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As has always been the case, the greatest stimulus to Jewish belief is immersion in a community of commitment. The greatest challenge to Jewish continuity is the difficulty that American and other Western Jews have in allowing communitarian commitments to supersede the Western commitment to radical autonomy. It is only in the context of committed community that it is possible to create a rich Jewish experience and the kinds of involvement that give Jewish beliefs and practice their full resonance. For Jewish belief only makes sense within a fully lived civilization, including not only worship and theology but the arts, literature, and shared daily life.

Since I believe that most American Jews share relatively enlightened ethical positions and have a desire to have ritual lives that reflect such commitments, I believe the second great challenge to Jewish continuity today is a lack of rigorous integration of values, everyday practices, ritual and belief systems. That is why I have been so committed to creating a Center for Jewish Ethics at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College that takes a deeply Jewish yet post-*halakhic* approach to the everyday decisions that people must face in their lives.

At no time in Jewish history did ideological divisions and controversies remain static for a long period. Since our world is changing ever more rapidly, we should not be surprised that denominational and ideological divisions, beliefs, and practices continue to undergo change. I see that not as a sign of shakiness but of the extraordinary ability of Jews and Judaism to adapt to new social, political, and technological situations.

It seems to me clear that, for the moment, there are two fundamental camps within the Jewish community—the relatively small Orthodox population and the much larger population of liberal Jews. I frankly do not now see how that schism is to be healed. But I am far less worried about unity than I am about creating a rigorous, knowledgeable, and exciting liberal Jewish community, and of course I am most concerned about how to do that not only under Reconstructionist auspices but also through other key, pancommunal institutions in American Jewish life.

If we face a truly disastrous schism, it is between Jews who act on the basis of serious commitment to Judaism and those who either do not have that commitment or do not act on it. It is just such a commitment that has led Reconstructionists to play a leading role in training rabbis specifically for campus Hillel societies, Jewish community centers, and chaplaincy. We must meet Jews where they are with the kinds of opportunities and support they need. That way, they can find the value in walking a path that can bring them to Jewish engagement.

The one thing it is safe to say about the future is that we cannot predict it. Of course there is a significant possibility of a large-scale revival of Judaism in America, but no one can foresee the likelihood of its occurrence. What we can do is prepare for it; we can create conditions that permit it. We can increase the level of Hebrew literacy. We can upgrade the quality of Jewish cultural opportunities. We can create increased opportunities for family education. We can deepen the experience of worship and ritual. We can make certain our communities are inclusive of all possible family structures and reach out to as many Jews as possible. We can create an extraordinarily exciting Jewish future if that is our first priority. It is that vital Jewish future, which grows so naturally out of the Jewish past and present, to which I am passionately committed.

DAVID A. TEUTSCH *is president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and editor of the new Reconstructionist prayer-book series,* Kol Haneshamah.

Harlan J. Wechsler

I BELIEVE IN the God of the Bible—Who is utterly other, one, indivisible, and incorporeal, unlike all things of this world. Language cannot describe Him, but He is known through His actions in the world. His wisdom is manifest in His sublime creation, His love in the giving of the Torah, His justice and power in the redemption of His people from slavery. The God of widows and orphans, Who is gracious and compassionate, is neither an object to be examined nor a theorem to be proved. God's existence is, as Abraham Joshua Heschel put it, an "ontological presupposition" that makes the response of the whole person to the mystery and transcendence of living intellectually understandable.

In the Bible and the Talmud, the believer is not a person who believes the unbelievable, but a person who trusts in God's concern. *Emunah*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

means just that: trust. The Bible therefore speaks of the people of Israel passing through the Red Sea and then "trusting" in God. To know God is to trust in Him and thereby to be transformed by Him. In places where human beings truly meet, God transforms that meeting. When we are ill, He is there at the bedside and His mercy transforms our pain. When death brings us close to the abyss, God transforms that place. When despair threatens and the whirlwind blows, God's presence makes suffering possible to bear.

God is known not only through the world but through His word. The Torah says that Moses went up to God (Exodus 19:3), and it says likewise that the Lord came down upon Sinai, on the top of the mountain (Exodus 19:20). Moses goes up "below ten handbreadths," Rabbi Yosi explains, and God comes down "above ten handbreadths." The two do not meet, but they come extraordinarily close. That is the nature of revelation: a human cognitive possibility stretched to its outer limit, combined with divine grace that goes very far but does not bring God into the human realm. The Torah occupies the place of that tenth handbreadth.

Revelation is more than divine presence; it yields divine commandments, all of which are binding. Can one have a constitution where only parts of the document have force? But the commandments are alive, not fossils. God's word is subject to human hearing, hearing that is frustrated by the inherent limits of language, let alone language that speaks to two realities: the divine and the human. Therefore Torah must be studied with all the tools of human creativity and analysis, including those of history and literary study. These disciplines help clarify the meaning of its words. But sacred texts stand outside history as well. To the community addressed by them, they infuse life with meaning. That meaning is seldom revealed by probing into their scientific origins—about which we will always be in doubt—but by the literature, the law, the creativity, and the ethical life to which the words give birth.

The saga of Jewish life is the romance between God and the people of Israel. Thus are we chosen. Not that others do not have their stories, too, or that we are better, larger, more powerful or more worthy than they. But our story, our romance, our life with God is embodied in our covenant with Him. Jewish history hands us our chosenness. Only time and the subsequent record of the community's deeds will tell if we are worthy of His love.

The larger role of the Jewish people is to be God's witnesses in a world where His presence may seem remote. This witnessing is twofold. First, to proclaim that there is one God in the world and therefore that history has a Judge Who stands above the temporal realm. The world has a King to Whom every ruler must answer, and to that King every dispossessed and downtrodden person may appeal. Second, Israel is the earthly witness of God's continued involvement in the world. Israel's redemption, whether out of Egypt or out of Auschwitz, is not only for Israel's sake. It is a lesson to the nations of God's justice in the world and His redeeming power. This is the meaning of Isaiah's eschatology and of Jewish messianism: the redemption of Israel brings light to the nations.

The Jewish world I know has been utterly transformed by the Holocaust and Israel. To me, the Holocaust teaches little about God and much about man. God creates all human beings with the power to do good or evil. What is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden about if not that? The problem of the Holocaust is the problem of culture. If the finest civilizations can produce mass murder, is literature, philosophy, science, music, or art worth our continued concern? All of my mind tells me that it is. But the future of history needs to see human creativity redeemed from evil. It needs to see man restored to his dignity. How long will that take?

Zionism has restored dignity to the Jewish people by restoring the homeland of the Jews. Powerlessness was a concomitant of homelessness, and therefore the restoration of the Jewish people to its homeland was a practical necessity to rid Jewish life of the end-product of anti-Semitism: the destruction of the Jews. This is the era of the ingathering of the exiles; and while the messiah has not come, his footsteps are heard. The mystery of Jewish history is disclosed when the land of Israel is sown and when Jewish culture flourishes in Zion rebuilt by Jews from the four corners of the earth. In Jerusalem, early one morning several years ago, the sound of jackhammers disturbed my sleep. Do these people rise with the sun, I complained to myself? And then, shortly after, I read the daily prayer that praises the Lord Who builds Jerusalem. I was so embarrassed, for how could I have complained? Imagine the privilege of being awakened from my sleep by the Builder of Jerusalem.

Israel has transformed my life. I have learned, personally, the meaning of the words: "For out of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Zion the Torah shall go forth and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem," for I have learned Hebrew, Bible, and Talmud in Israel and I have gone out to teach. Every time I am in Israel my own study and observance are renewed and refreshed. The texts come alive and are more compelling than ever before.

In America, Jewish belief is strengthened by the basic decency of our society, a society based on both biblical and Enlightenment ideals. Biblical ideals—the importance of the individual and the community, family-centered morality, and respect for the scriptural tradition—penetrate deeply into American life. The demise of religion in America is a danger to Jews as it is to others. Not long ago, our children grew up with standards of morality in the air. Those times are gone and the vacuum of values needs to be filled with religious rebirth—a rebirth that itself needs the Enlightenment ideal of tolerance. For while yearning for a widespread return to scripturally based values, I fear an atavistic Christianity which encourages hatred of Jews or seeks to convert us to a "truer" faith.

At the same time, the openness of American society allows Jews to disappear, an opportunity seldom offered with so much love. Countering assimilation is therefore one of our foremost challenges. But we are challenged, as well, to participate in the creation of a moral society, a society unmarked by poverty or hate. We are challenged to contribute to the cultural life of America and to create great works of Jewish culture in this Diaspora, great works in English and in Hebrew that reverberate to our people's classic concerns.

Our denominational divisions are particularly American. If you do not like what is happening here, you make something else happen next door. Therefore it is likely that ideological divisions will abound. America has provided us with a home in which we can flourish and multiply, even denominationally. But we need to bridge our differences because we Jews have common concerns—such as maintaining mutually acceptable laws of marriage, divorce, and conversion so that we do not split apart, caring for our needy, and defending ourselves against anti-Semitism. Denominationalism is healthy, not a plague. But we are foolish if we do not recognize that we need each other and that we must continue to be responsible for one another.

A *large*-scale revival of Judaism in America? Only prophets know. Look not to the numbers, however, because quality and creativity define a renaissance, not the head count. While numbers play a part, religious revivals transform lives—and on that score we are doing quite well.

HARLAN J. WECHSLER *is rabbi of Congregation Or Zarua (Conservative) in New York City and visiting assistant professor of philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.*

Jack Wertheimer

THE RELIGIOUS crisis facing American Jews today transcends individual articles of belief, for it emanates from a clash of world-views. There is a sharp dissonance between traditional Jewish perspectives and the prevailing cultural outlook within American society. As a result, some of the most basic categories of Jewish thought are eroding under the pressures of current mores. No revitalization of Judaism is possible unless the Jewish community confronts this dilemma.

It is noteworthy that the twin pillars supporting the edifice of Judaism are linked together in one of the most commonly uttered Jewish benedictions: "Blessed are You, God, King of the universe, Who has chosen us from all peoples, and has given us His Torah." This blessing from the daily liturgy is also recited in virtually every synagogue across the land by individuals who are called to the Torah whenever it is read in public, and it is central to the ritual performance of almost every bar- and bat-mitzvah celebrant. It unequivocally expresses the conviction that the Jewish people has been chosen by God and that Judaism is a divinely commanded discipline. But despite the popular usage of this blessing, there is reason to fear that decreasing numbers of Jews have internalized its message.

"Who has chosen us from all peoples": The Hebrew Bible repeatedly reiterates that God has chosen the Israelites to live as a holy people, set apart from others. It bluntly identifies some of the immoral practices of neighboring tribes and enjoins the people of Israel to behave differently. During the Middle Ages, both Christian and Muslim states set Jews apart through legislation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and social policy, thereby reinforcing Jewish separateness. And so, despite their frequent contacts with Gentiles, Jews maintained a degree of critical distance from their neighbors, whose "otherness" has been a recurring motif of Jewish folk culture.

But as Jews began their struggle for equality in the modern era, some of these attitudes gradually changed. After all, how could Jews argue for admission as equals on the grounds that they are no different from their neighbors and simultaneously maintain a strong sense of distinctiveness?

The concept of chosenness proved especially problematic in the American setting. Most major theologians produced by American Jewry have been repelled not only by arrogant assertions of Jewish cultural and religious superiority that sometimes are associated with chosenness, but also by the incompatibility of this belief with notions of relativism and pluralism. Indeed, some Jewish religious movements have removed offending passages from the Jewish liturgy in order to neutralize the claim of chosenness: Mordecai M. Kaplan deleted all references to the election of Israel from his Reconstructionist prayer book, and the Reform movement has omitted the distinction between "Israel and the nations" from the liturgy recited at the conclusion of the Sabbath.

This disinclination to demarcate boundaries is creating a crisis of syncretism in the contemporary American Jewish community. In some cases, it has led to the merging of religious ceremonies—such as interfaith wedding rituals—and the extension of liturgical roles to Gentiles during synagogue worship. In other cases, it has led to a syncretism of ideologies whereby political convictions are arbitrarily deemed Jewish because people of Jewish origin hold them. Such confusion, it must be added, emanates from a long history of "Americanization," in which Jews tried to convince themselves that Jewish and American civilizations are not only compatible, but form a seamless tapestry. Generations of American Jews have been taught that the Jewish and Western aspects of their identities mesh neatly rather than produce powerful—perhaps irreconcilable—dissonances.

The American Jewish community now must confront the consequences of this exercise in self-deception. Situated in an open society that welcomes Jews with unprecedented hospitality, American Jewry is losing a significant portion of its population to assimilation and intermarriage. At greatest risk are those who are least prepared to regard Judaism as a unique system with a richly developed culture sometimes profoundly at odds with prevailing mores. Young people who have been reared on a diet of cultural relativism are especially vulnerable, for they have been taught that the sole purpose of religion is to make people "good." In such a climate, even the traditional Jewish prohibition against intermarriage may no longer be invoked. Indeed, one of the first lessons young Jews learn in high school and on college campuses today is that an unwillingness to date members of other ethnic communities is the hallmark of a racist. Only a bigot (or a member of a sanctioned racial or cultural minority) would let parochial loyalties limit his or her marital choices.

"And has given us His Torah." The second endangered Jewish premise concerns the very nature of Judaism as an ordered structure of commandments. Judaism has long been understood as a discipline, a yoke, assumed by Jews because God has commanded them to behave in a particular fashion. The system of Jewish law (*halakhah*) channels behavior and guides Jews to make particular choices. Although the biblical text already recognizes that human beings have the power to choose, it also defines such decisions as a clear choice between good and evil, between life and death.

Such views are greatly at odds with the prevailing temper of our society, which frames decisions in instrumental or therapeutic terms. We are taught to act in a manner that serves our ends or feels good. We hearken to our own inner voice, and can barely conceive of a commanding voice emanating from outside us. The very notion of a religious "obligation" is deemed oppressive.

To accommodate this way of thinking, Jewish religious teachings have been reformulated. We observe the Sabbath not because it is commanded of us, but because the Sabbath provides us with "quality time" with our families. Other *mitzvot*, commandments, are to be observed only if we *as individuals* feel commanded. Even the decision to remain Jewish is now defined as a personal choice; we are not bound by the collective decision of our ancestors, let alone by a system imposed upon the Jewish people by God. For most American Jews, Judaism has ceased to be a coherent discipline, but rather has become a series of subjective selections from an *à la carte* menu.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Neither the memory of the Holocaust nor an attachment to the state of Israel can alone shore up the besieged world-view of traditional Judaism. At best, each may inspire American Jews to rededicate themselves to some fundamental teachings. The Holocaust dramatizes the heroism of Jews who paid the ultimate price for maintaining their distinctive ways; and the vibrant Jewish state reminds us of what Diaspora Jews have sacrificed in the quest for acceptance—the Hebrew language as the preferred medium for Jewish expression; attachment to a specific parcel of land, the land of Israel; and a visceral connectedness to the family of the Jewish people.

But fundamentally, the task of religious revitalization must be performed by American Jews. If we are receptive, we will find allies among those of our neighbors who also struggle with the dissonance between their Protestant, Catholic, or Muslim religious beliefs and the dominant liberal and secular culture, which has little serious use for any religion. Sadly, most American Jews prefer the company of those who speak soothingly of tolerance even as their powerful culture overwhelms alternative world-views.

JACK WERTHEIMER *is professor of Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (Conservative).*

Eric H. Yoffie

I BELIEVE IN God Who gave Torah to the people of Israel in a process of revelation beginning at Sinai. This belief is the foundation on which all of Judaism is constructed, and without which Judaism—a religious civilization—forfeits meaning, coherence, and the possibility of survival.

The heart of Torah is *mitzvah*—the individual divine command. The *mitzvot* of the Jewish tradition direct my conduct and shape my life. But how do I determine which of the *mitzvot* are binding for me? Torah was transmitted to Moses and his spiritual descendants—the prophets and rabbis who fashioned our tradition and passed it on to subsequent generations. But in recording divine revelation as they experienced it, they did so as fallible human beings, products of the unique conditions of their time. Furthermore, Torah is a compilation of both divine command and human response: it is a record of God talking to Jews and Jews talking to God. When I examine the writings of Torah, how then do I know what is divine revelation and what is human interpretation?

As a *mitzvah*-inspired liberal Jew, the only option that I have is to decide for myself what binds me. I will seek guidance from rabbis and teachers, but ultimately I must *examine* each *mitzvah* and ask the question: do I feel commanded in this instance as Moses was commanded? Here I rely on the words of Martin Buber: "I must distinguish in my innermost being between what is commanded me and what is not commanded me." For the great majority of American Jews, there is no leader or institution with the authority to impose commandments; the autonomous individual decides for himself or herself.

Our chosenness is a religious fact and a sociological necessity. Singled out by God to bring goodness and compassion to an often corrupted humanity, Jews have maintained their hopes in the darkest of times by recognizing their special destiny.

Our chosenness flows from the covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. God bestowed Torah upon the Jews and the Jews accepted the gift and its accompanying obligations. No self-aggrandizement is implied by this fact. The covenant is not addressed to other peoples; therefore, in asserting Jewish chosenness, we claim no Jewish monopoly on salvation or truth.

Still, the covenantal community of Israel has a special role to play in history. Our survival cannot be comprehended in any other terms. God has commanded us and needs us to study Torah, engage in prayer, and observe the rituals of our tradition. Most of all, the Eternal One needs us to resuscitate in the world the fundamental values of Torah—that human life is sacred, that justice is a supreme value, and that freedom is the touchstone of civilization—and to bring repair, wholeness, and sanctity to all of humankind.

Belief in the messiah and the messianic age serves as an essential reminder that humanity is redeemable. We are a future-oriented people, looking to a golden age that awaits us over the horizon. But the messiah is always a destination, not a current reality. Messianic frenzies, without exception, have always been catastrophic for our

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people. Those who insist that the messiah is here or that his coming is imminent are both inviting disaster and engaging in the profanation of God's name.

Anti-Semitism, on the most modest or most massive scale, is a profound evil, requiring an aggressive and immediate political response. But it has no impact on my faith, which is rooted in commitment to Torah.

The land of Israel has a special hold on the Jewish soul. The Torah which spells out for us a way of life and a religious destiny also binds us to a land. The establishment of a sovereign Jewish state in the land of Israel is a blessing because Israel restores to a segment of the Jewish people control over its own destiny. In a world capable of evil and destruction, the absence of power is a curse. The state of Israel has removed that curse from our heads by returning power to Jewish hands. No longer are Jews totally dependent on the good will of others for their physical safety, and I find relief and satisfaction in that development.

Nonetheless, the religious impact of the Jewish state on my personal faith and observance has been limited. The religious significance of the land of Israel lies in the fact that it provides a framework in which Torah is to be observed and a holy community is to be created. But a dynamic, non-fundamentalist religious life in Israel has yet to emerge. This is due to a variety of factors, including ongoing wars and cultural and political peculiarities which have produced an often extreme religious minority and a mostly secular majority. Liberal American Jews such as myself yearn for a partnership with Israeli Jews in strengthening Jewish religious civilization throughout the world. We will not be satisfied until such a partnership comes into being, but we have made little progress to date.

The decline of community, the collapse of the family, the deterioration of moral standards, the growing gap between rich and poor, and the uncertainties of a technologically advanced economy all threaten Jewish life in America. At the same time, the diversity and tolerance of American culture and the success and wealth of American Jews have opened up opportunities that did not exist a generation ago. Particularly encouraging are the beginnings of a religious revival in the general society which may be related to a similar phenomenon among Jews. At the grass roots of the Jewish community, tremendous religious energy has begun to emerge among at least some of our people—leading to a degree of observance that would have surprised and delighted my grandparents' generation.

I am saddened by the growing rancor in our community on a wide variety of issues, and the tendency of so many Jewish leaders to be more intractable than ever before. I would like to see more humility in Jewish life, and a willingness of all religious groups to recognize their failures and limitations and to engage in ongoing internal stock-taking. This might not bring unity, but at least it might result in regular conversation and cooperation among us.

If there is hope for a greater degree of communal cooperation, it lies in promoting the religious revival mentioned above. The concept of the Jews being one people is a religious idea, and not an ethnic or political one. It is an idea rooted in covenant, in Torah, and in religious commitment. If we are to talk of a measure of Jewish unity in the United States and of the totality and interdependence of the Jewish people throughout the world, we will have to revive the religious ideas on which these notions are based.

On balance, however, I would be surprised if the current divisions—particularly between Orthodox and non-Orthodox religious groups—were to be narrowed in any significant way. To take the most frequently discussed example: the Reform movement will not reverse its decision on patrilineal descent, and Orthodox leaders will not accept this decision at any time in the foreseeable future. This leaves us divided on an issue of fundamental consequence. We will have to learn to live with such divisions, recognizing the advantages of a vigorous pluralism, hoping for a measure of civility, and praying that in the event of an emergency our community can draw together as it has so often done in the past.

A large-scale revival of Judaism in America is dependent on a large-scale investment in Jewish education. It is clear what we need: Jewish camps, family education, day schools, residential retreats, programs in Israel, and outreach programs. We know what to do, but we have never had the will to do it. But the current stirring of Jewish hearts, including the yearning for text study and heartfelt prayer evident in so many of our synagogues, gives me cause for optimism. At a time when Jewish lives are being touched by Torah and when a hunger for the spiritual nourishment of Judaism is everywhere apparent, I would hope that we will find the visionary leadership that will take us in a new direction. It is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not too late to commit ourselves to serious Jewish learning as the best path and the first step to securing the Jewish future.

ERIC H. YOFFIE, *a Reform rabbi, is president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.*

Sheldon Zimmerman

I BELIEVE IN God, the Creator of the universe and all that exists, the ongoing creative source of its unity, harmony, order, and meaning. God has established a covenantal relationship with all humankind and everything that lives (the Noahide covenant), calling all of us to an ethical life of justice and peace. We are all God's children. This is one of the first and most basic lessons of the Torah. God has called the Jewish people in particular to divine service through an additional covenant, established first with Abraham and Sarah and continuing through the other matriarchs and patriarchs. This covenant was affirmed again at Sinai through Torah and *mitzvot*, and continues in the covenantal life of the Jewish people in our own time and into the future. We are part, then, of the Jewish family and the larger human family.

God entered history as a redemptive force at the time of the exodus from Egypt and as guarantor of an age of justice and peace for all humankind at the end of history. We humans are called to work together cooperatively and with God to bring this ultimate time into being. Interfaith activity for social justice is a divine requirement. *Tikkun olam*—the obligation to repair the brokenness of the world—is ours to work for as Jews and together with other human beings.

Within this universal framework, we as Jews have a uniquely particular place. The Jewish people has been called by God to become a kingdom of priests and a holy people. We have responded to this divine call in covenantal relationship with God by creating a system of laws, responsibilities, and obligations incumbent upon us personally and communally.

The Torah is the story of our people's encounter with the divine and our story as well. It frames and anchors our understanding of the world, ourselves, and our place in it, the meaning in and of our lives and God's demands of us. It is the prism through which we see and understand the world (creation, kinship of all humankind, the sacred journey, the land of promise, etc.). In the words, values, and stories of Torah our people have heard God's commanding voice in the past and we return continuously to Torah to attempt to hear God's commanding voice in our lives.

There are times when we do not hear the voice of Sinai in the laws of earlier or present generations, when the law does not take on the power of *mitzvah* (living commandment) for us. But in our search for *mitzvah* we are bound to return to Torah again and again—it is our starting place. Torah is binding as the source of our story, the framework of our theology, even though not all the written or oral particulars meet the test of *mitzvah*. Torah becomes our ongoing attempt and activity to hear God's voice in our own times as we face issues that challenge us to move to newer understandings. Torah is process, not a finished written or oral product.

In response to God's gift of life, we create a life of study, ritual prayer, and acts of loving-kindness which enhances our awareness of this precious gift, deepens our sense of wonder and awe, and enables us to affirm and enrich our lives. This too is part of the process of Torah—our "lived" response to God and God's gifts.

At the same time we are bound by obligations to the Jewish people, its security, vitality, history, and future. Especially after the Holocaust, but in the face of all Jewish history (and its demands upon us) the creative survival of the Jewish people and its covenant with God becomes a necessity. The Holocaust challenged our too-easy reliance on rationalism and modern values. What can it mean to be truly human in the face of such human evil? How have we humans as persons and nations misused our power to destroy each other and God's world? What specific obligations do we as Jews have to and for each other and our people in the face of such profound evil directed against us and our existence? There can be no easy answers to these questions and never again a simple reliance on human good will and feelings when it comes to questions of our continuity and survival.

We live between the poles of the Holocaust and the birth of the state of Israel. To live in the time of the miraculous birth of the third Jewish com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

monwealth creates new *mitzvot* for me as a Jew. Where should I live? How do I live out that part of the covenant and Torah bound to the land and its existence? If I choose, as I have at this point, to live in the Diaspora, what will my relationship be to the state, land, and people of Israel?

These remain ongoing questions which challenge and confront me. As a Reform Jew I believe that Reform Judaism cannot be only a Diaspora movement. It must sink its roots deeply in Israel, be informed and formed by it, and at the same time bring the Reform movement's understanding of the spiritual life, Torah, and *mitzvah* to the people of Israel, many of whom are removed from Jewish rootedness. We are linked in a connection that is being formed, reformed, and reinterpreted as it is lived out in our time.

The openness of America and its welcoming embrace of Judaism and Jews, with the accompanying freedom accorded to each of us, are great challenges today: how to establish communal responsibilities and commitments, a sense of Jewish obligation and *mitzvah* in the face of the radicalized freedom of self and privatized religiosity. Our continuing existence as a religious community and "faithful" persons requires standards and a renewed sense of *mitzvot*. In this process we must take seriously personal freedom and choice. But this freedom exists alongside and in a dynamic tension with responsibility and commitment. So much that anchored us even in our freedom is gone—strong communities, neighborhoods, vital Jewish family life. New anchors are emerging—search for literacy, development of a pluralistic community embracing and encouraging a variety of personal faith expressions, the transformation of the synagogue and other communal institutions. In addition, the growing search for personal meaning and values in life and the collapse of aspects of the American dream add to a possible response, a response that comes from deep within individual souls.

I do not believe that we have ever had Jewish religious unity. We have worked together cooperatively in meeting certain crises. We have never been unified. Nevertheless, I worry about the increasing divisiveness and isolation. New avenues for joint effort and dialogue are essential for a healthy, pluralistic community. But Jewish religious unity has not been, will not be, and perhaps in America should not be on the agenda. After all, there are major areas of disagreement (e.g., religious equality of women, etc.). But certainly the non-Orthodox communities and the centrist Orthodox community have much to discuss and to work on together. Pluralism can be healthy and enriching. We have much to learn from each other.

I believe in the ongoing power of our covenant with God, and the transformative power of Torah and *mitzvot* in our lives. The American Jewish community just now is emerging from its infancy to an age of renewed responsibility and possibility. Most of us have been here just for a century. We are assuming our place in the Jewish world, creating uniquely American institutions (the synagogue of the 90's, our academies, seminaries, camps, schools, libraries, research centers, communal centers, and institutions). These institutions as they are formed and transformed have the power to create a vital future. We can bring our people home to God, Torah, and *mitzvot*. There is a manifest joy in being a Jew, a wonderful and precious way of making a difference and investing our lives with meaning.

Two things are happening at the same time: assimilation and abdication on the one hand and, on the other, renewed Jewish living and interest which transcend any one denomination and embrace them all. I believe that if we put our resources, energy, and faith to work, the latter will prevail, and American Judaism will write its unique chapter in covenant history. In all of this, God will be with us too. This I believe.

SHELDON ZIMMERMAN, *formerly senior rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, is president of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Reform).*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books in Review

The Higher Liberalism

Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy
by Michael J. Sandel
Harvard. 417 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Wilfred M. McClay

ONE SHOULD not confuse the rapidly changing fortunes of the political battlefield with the slow, subterranean process by which ideas are formed and changed. Whoever becomes our next President, and whichever party controls Congress, the deeper evolution of public attitudes is likely to continue its now three-decade-long movement away from the regnant forms of American liberalism.

This is likely to be the case even among liberals themselves. Indeed, one sign of internal dissatisfaction is the rise in some liberal circles of a movement, communitarianism, which attempts to harness positions usually regarded as conservative, especially in the areas of personal and civic virtue, to the cart of a political philosophy that has relentlessly subordinated considerations of the common good to the sovereign liberty of rights-bearing individuals. In the work of Amitai Etzioni, Robert Bellah, and William Galston, the last-named of whom served for a time as Bill Clinton's domestic-policy adviser, one sees an effort, however vague and tentative (or opportunistic), to put some distance between today's liberals and today's liberalism.

In *Democracy's Discontent*, Michael J. Sandel, who teaches political science at Harvard, has given us one of the most accessible and thoughtful explorations of the communitarian alternative yet to appear. Long a critic of rights-based liberalism, Sandel here examines virtually the entire sweep of American history, searching assiduously for the wrong choices and missed opportunities that have led us into our present discontent. The result is a work of impressive scope and ambition, and one which has already won praise from readers across the political spectrum.

Sandel defines today's liberalism as that of "the procedural republic": a liberalism that makes government the referee of fair procedure and the guarantor of individual rights, while simultaneously insisting that government maintain a scrupulous neutrality as to the substantive ends individuals elect to pursue. This is the liberalism of what Richard John Neuhaus has called "the naked public square." By failing to inculcate the civic virtues and qualities of character necessary to sustain liberty and self-governance, it has, Sandel asserts, proved inadequate to the needs of a democratic republic.

Like other communitarians, Sandel looks to a revitalized conception of citizenship as a starting place for a better public philosophy. But he differs from them in turning for inspiration to the republican political theory that greatly influenced the generation of the American Founders. Today's liberalism, he writes, does not represent the only possible elaboration of American political ideals; in fact, it is a dramatic and relatively recent departure. For most of the 19th cen-

WILFRED M. MCCLAY, *who teaches history at Tulane University, is the author of* The Masterless: Self and Society in Modern America.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JEWISH THOUGHT

Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism

Aviezer Ravitzky

Translated by Michael Swirsky and Jonathan Chipman

"A fundamental study of the interrelationship between religious orthodoxy and Zionism. A brilliant work, it is must-reading for all those interested in religion, the State of Israel, and Judaism in our time."—Steven T. Katz, Cornell University

Paper $16.95 280 pages

Thinking in Jewish

Jonathan Boyarin

"This is a formidable book. It is playful, broadly literate, and intellectual, while being generally accessible to those critics and readers interested in broad and cross-disciplinary topics. From field work to literary theory, this volume is sovereign in its breadth and depth."
—Sander L. Gilman

***Paper $14.95 200 pages**

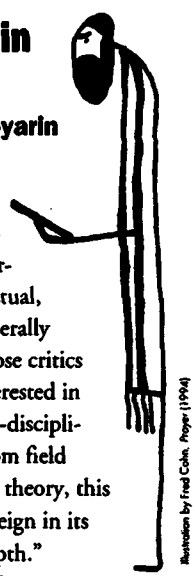


Illustration by Fred Cohn, Prayer (1994)

Available at bookstores.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
5801 South Ellis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60637

http://www.press.uchicago.edu

tury, liberal conceptions of the freely choosing, unconditioned, unencumbered, and autonomous individual were balanced against republican ideas that exalted public life, involvement in the process of localized self-rule, and deliberation with one's fellow citizens on matters of the common good.

The story of America's evolving public philosophy, then, as Sandel tells it, is a tale of two traditions, liberal and republican, and of how the former has "gradually crowded out" the latter in legal, social, economic, and political thought, and eventually in the very texture of our lives. Sandel devotes most of *Democracy's Discontent* to a detailed historical reconstruction of this process, showing how, in nearly every important sector, the normative standard of public life was once very different from what we find today. In conceptions of the economy, the family, church-state relations, free speech, constitutional law, privacy, productive labor, consumerism—to name a few of the topics Sandel explores—there was once an assumption that the polity had a formative, prescriptive, "soulcraft" function to perform, an assumption that has been so completely undone by the procedural republic that we have forgotten it was ever there.

GIVEN THE breadth of Sandel's historical account, one turns in high hopes to his practical recommendations. But in this respect his book falls disappointingly short. Indeed, there is nothing here that most standard-issue liberals would not enthusiastically endorse: community-development corporations in the inner cities; anti-Wal-Mart crusades in the suburbs; new planned towns like Seaside, Florida; the schemes for social and economic organizing touted by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), founded by the radical activist Saul Alinsky.

This is pretty familiar, near-beer stuff—unlikely, if implemented, to make much of a difference in addressing the underlying problem Sandel has identified. Nor does he go so far as to endorse recent Republican efforts in the areas of renewed federalism and decentralization, even though these certainly represent the most obvious, concrete, and feasible direction to be taken from his argument. There is thus a striking disparity between the devastating severity of this book's historical indictment and the mild, speculative, let's-not-be-in-a-hurry-about-any-of-this tone of its suggestions for reform. In this, Sandel would seem to be the quintessential New Democrat: willing to lament the ill effects of liberalism, capable of formulating problems in fresh, uncanonical ways, but unable or unwilling seriously to entertain uncanonical solutions.

Nor is this the only problem in *Democracy's Discontent*. How much of the republican idea can, in fact, be salvaged for use today? Part of the attraction of republicanism for communitarians lies in the fact that it seems to provide a purely social and secular way of reimagining a more cohesive community, one that does not require an explicit moral and religious consensus. Like many who are alarmed about the culture wars of contemporary America, Sandel wants to find a way to heal some of the polarization in our society, without imposing any ideological conformity on the participants. A laudable goal; but it is hard to see how the all-consuming demands of the republican idea can be reconciled with a high degree of moral and religious pluralism—or, for that matter, with mass democracy on a national scale.

Sandel is right to assert, for example, that the proscription of religious speech from the public square has actually served to alienate and harden the perspectives of many religious conservatives, while impoverishing life by removing the consideration of ultimate ends from public discussion. But it does not follow that the profound differences we see today can be addressed merely by letting everyone have a turn at the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

podium. On issues like abortion, euthanasia, and sexual ethics, we are, as a nation, very far apart, and perhaps becoming more so all the time. Communitarians sometimes seem to think that, if only we could recreate the appropriate conditions for fully functioning communities, healthy deliberation and working agreement would follow. But that is at best only partly true. To a considerable extent, in order to have a community we have to agree first.

This may seem to lead us back to the quintessentially liberal notion of the social contract, by means of which a political body is constituted through mutual consent. But it should equally call to mind the morally richer idea of the covenant, a foundational element in American political thought which Sandel ignores completely in his analysis but which is central to one of the greatest communitarian documents in American history: John Winthrop's 1630 speech, "A Modell of Christian Charity." Perhaps best known for its figure of New England as a "City Upon a Hill," the speech also offers a vivid understanding of political life very different from either the republican or the liberal one, even as it too works powerfully against the notion of the unencumbered self.

"We are entered into Covenant with [God] for this work," declares Winthrop, and the terms of that covenant indicate exactly how "encumbered" is this particular vision of community:

> [W]e must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain one another in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities . . . delight in one another, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission. . . .

Strange, that a professor employed by a venerable institution that was founded in Winthrop's colony only six years after the above words were spoken, and that was formed explicitly by the intense religious aspirations of Puritan culture, should neglect these sources of American political thought and culture. But it is not just Puritan ideals that Sandel ignores. He seems to have excluded the entire tradition of Protestant Christianity from his analysis of American history.

To be sure, there is a lot wrong with the Protestant tradition; it has always struggled with its antinomian and individualistic tendencies, and in our time those tendencies have nearly destroyed it. But at its best it has balanced respect for the dignity of the individual against a sense of divinely ordained obligation to others, a balance that is, in many ways, more attractive than the compulsory socialization demanded by pure republicanism. What could be a better warrant against unencumbered selves, and more conducive to social cohesion, than faithful observance of the Ten Commandments?

Not only does Sandel take too little account of the religious dimension in America's formative tradition, he also assigns too great a role in that tradition to the concept of republicanism. He is not the only scholar recently to have done so: a number of historians have tried to find in republicanism a homegrown social (but secular) alternative to liberalism. But as any reader of *The Federalist* knows, even the Framers of the Constitution did not use the word "republican" in quite the same sense that Sandel and others have done. John Adams's quip, made in 1807, still stands: "there is not a more unintelligible word in the English language than republicanism."

Finally, and wonderfully complicating all these matters, is the fact that, in the American context, there is nothing more deeply rooted than a certain stubborn, ornery commitment to *separate-*

In the Almost Promised Land

American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935
Hasia Diner

"Vividly illustrates the well-known but little-understood phenomenon of Jewish support for a better life for American blacks. Diner has produced a significant contribution to the examination of ethnic studies and an insightful analysis of certain aspects of the early years of the civil rights movement in the twentieth century." —*Cithara: Essays in the Judeo-Christian Tradition*

$14.95 paperback

After Auschwitz

History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism
second edition
Richard L. Rubenstein

"When Richard Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz* was first published in 1966, it became something of an instant classic, a wrenching reappraisal of Jewish theology. . . . The new edition is equally powerful, underscoring that growth can mean a deepening of earlier, radical ideas rather than their abandonment."—Eric Blake, *UPI*

$15.95 paperback

Cleansing the Fatherland

Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene
Götz Aly, Peter Chroust, and Christian Pross
translated by Belinda Cooper
foreword by Michael H. Kater

"Thanks to the work of Aly and his associates, those areas of medical criminality that escaped the retribution the Allies visited on the more obviously ghoulish experimenters . . . have at long last come out of the shadows." —Michael Burleigh, *Times Higher Education Supplement*

$16.95 paperback

The Johns Hopkins University Press
Hampden Station, Baltimore, MD 21211
1-800-537-5487
http://jhupress.jhu.edu/home.html

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness—minding one's own business, staying in one's own space, sticking to one's last—as the precondition for felicitous and noncoercive relations with others. Good fences, in this view, make good neighbors. I will not venture to say whether this trait comes out of Protestantism, liberalism, republicanism, or (as seems most likely) some peculiar combination of the three, along with the sheer territoriality of human nature. But the trait I am talking about is beautifully illustrated in Robert Frost's familiar poem, "Mending Wall," with its uncanny grasp of the melancholy fact that in a fallen world, sometimes the best way to love your neighbor as yourself is to maintain the wall between your property and his.

The rethinking of liberalism, to which republican-communitarian thought is such a valuable contributor, should not, in its rush to combat the hypertrophy of the modern self, forget about this instinctive American sense of the dignity of self-sufficiency, of separateness and solitude. Such dignity is not incompatible with some elements of the republican tradition, particularly as Sandel understands it. But it derives its real strength from something quite different: a classical-liberal insistence upon the limits of public life. Perhaps the ultimate irony is that this notion itself cannot be sustained for long without the powerful checks provided by other formative moral influences. The fading away of such checks in our time, due to the weakening influence of family life and religious tradition, goes a long way toward explaining our predicament, and the revival of the republican idea will not be enough to restore them.

Performance Artist

Franz Liszt:
The Final Years, 1861-1886
by Alan Walker
Knopf. 640 pp. $50.00

Reviewed by
Terry Teachout

TO SAY that Franz Liszt was the most famous pianist of the 19th century barely suggests the extent of his celebrity. Born in Hungary in 1811, he made his debut at the age of nine, met Beethoven three years later, and was known throughout Europe by the time he was thirteen. As an adult, his public appearances were greeted, especially by women, with an enthusiasm that would strikingly anticipate the reception of such 20th-century popular musicians as Elvis Presley and the Beatles. "Admirers swarmed all over him," Alan Walker writes in his multi-volume biography, the third and last installment of which has just been published, "and ladies fought over his silk handkerchiefs and velvet gloves, which they then ripped to pieces as souvenirs."

If tabloid journalism had existed in the 19th century, Liszt's sexual escapades would have appeared regularly on the front pages. (He fathered three illegitimate children, one of whom became the mistress and, later, the second wife of Richard Wagner.) Still, it was not his love life but his piano playing that was the source of his celebrity. Contemporary accounts would defy belief were it not for the fact that they all say more or less the same thing: he was a performer of extraordinary and unprecedented virtuosity. The word Liszt himself used to describe his playing was "transcendental."

Liszt died in 1886, a decade too soon to have made recordings. But if we cannot hear how he sounded in performance, evidence of a different kind—namely, his compositions—suggests that he was, at the very least, the greatest musical executant of his time. Indeed, Liszt was incontestably a composer of significance. His output was vast (the catalogue of his works in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* takes up 21 closely printed pages) and, though uneven, full of pieces of astonishing individuality. He invented the single-movement "symphonic poem," and his harmonic innovations directly influenced Wagner, whose *Tristan und Isolde*, the fountainhead of musical modernity, could not have been written without Liszt's example. To this day, Liszt's music continues to be played regularly, and such works as the B Minor Sonata, the *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, the *Transcendental Etudes*, and the two concertos are part of the repertoire of every aspiring virtuoso pianist.

And yet, popular though Liszt's music has remained, it is regarded with considerable ambivalence by critics and scholars, and sometimes even by the musicians who play it. Alfred Brendel, among the finest present-day interpreters of Liszt's piano works, speaks revealingly of the composer's penchant for

> facile melody, the compulsion to say something two or three times, lack of formal economy, and a reliance on the glorious and idealistic. . . . Liszt's variety extends from the sacred to the utterly profane, from the lavishly sumptuous to the ascetic—and from the careless to the masterly.

By contrast, Alan Walker's biography is a brief for the defense: it contends unequivocally that Liszt was both a great man and a great composer. Walker's advocacy is so fervent, in fact, that to some it may seem obtrusive. But his claim to have undertaken his three volumes in order to present "a more truthful picture of Liszt, one . . . not warped by all the old unthinking generalizations that still pass for the story

TERRY TEACHOUT *is* COMMENTARY*'s music critic.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his life," deserves to be treated seriously. While this superbly written biography is important for many reasons, not least its painstaking scholarship—it is the first fully reliable account of Liszt's amazingly eventful life—Walker's most notable achievement is to have stripped away a century's worth of anachronistic preconceptions.

The key to understanding, as Walker makes clear, lies in Liszt's notion of the artist (i.e., himself) as a genius, singled out by destiny for greatness. "It was left to Liszt," Walker writes,

> to foster the view that an artist is a superior being, because divinely gifted, and that the rest of mankind, of whatever social class, owed him respect and even homage. This view of the artist who walks with God and brings fire down from heaven with which to kindle the hearts of mankind became so deeply entrenched in the Romantic consciousness that today we regard it as a cliché. Nonetheless, the cliché is important, since it explains much about Liszt that would otherwise remain a mystery. When he walked on stage wearing his medals and his Hungarian sword of honor, it was not out of vanity but rather . . . the most telling gesture he could make to show the world that the times had changed.

What made this posturing palatable was the fact that Liszt was not just a traveling virtuoso, playing solely for cash and applause. His oft-repeated motto was *génie oblige* (genius obligates), and the reference to *noblesse oblige* was not accidental. At the age of thirty-five, he stopped giving recitals altogether: thereafter, he never again played in public for his own profit, concentrating instead on teaching, composing, and conducting. Even during his touring days, Liszt devoted much of his time and energy to playing the music of other composers, and as music director of the dukedom of Weimar (a post he held from 1848 to 1861), he continued this practice, conducting the premieres of Wagner's *Lohengrin* and Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini*.

Indeed, such ambitious undertakings—largely forgotten today, save by scholars—obscured Liszt's own achievements as a composer. "The world persisted to the end in calling him the greatest pianist," Saint-Saëns once said, "in order to avoid the trouble of considering his claims as one of the most remarkable of composers."

The third volume of *Franz Liszt* is particularly valuable for its detailed discussion of the little-known compositions of Liszt's old age, which Walker describes in terms whose effusiveness is—as so often in the course of these volumes—initially startling but in the end persuasive:

"Finkielkraut's rich, elegant (and beautifully translated) book elaborates a sequence of questions about **what it means to be Jewish."** —*The Independent*

The Imaginary Jew
Alain Finkielkraut
Translated by Kevin O'Neill and David Suchoff
$25 cloth

"Sadly, because there will always be paranoid and gullible people looking for **a scapegoat** for society's ills, Binjamin Segel's 1926 book **will always be timely."**
—*Philadelphia Forum*

A Lie and a Libel
The History of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*
Binjamin W. Segel
Translated and edited by Richard S. Levy
$22.50 cloth

"N,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From the vantage-point of the 20th century, everything seems to have flowed from him. His experiments in harmony, his audacious handling of form, his unparalleled ability to draw strange sonorities from his instruments—all confirm that his was one of the truly revolutionary spirits in music.*

But are Walker's powers of persuasion likely to bring about a general revaluation of Liszt as a composer? That may be doubtful. The "problem" posed by his music is that its Romantic rhetoric is as alien to modern sensibilities as, say, the poetry of Shelley. Older critics, their tastes shaped by modernism, find Liszt's florid theatricality a near-insurmountable obstacle; younger ones, who view the world with the reflexive irony of postmodernism, balk at the sincerity which lies just beneath the theatricality. For the same reasons, many pianists (Alfred Brendel is an important exception), though attracted by the opportunities Liszt offers for technical display, are incapable of playing his music convincingly: what was wholly sincere in conception becomes grandiloquent and unserious in realization.

On records, the strongest case for Liszt's music, not surprisingly, was made by those prewar artists who—unlike today's musicians—took his romanticism for granted.† And those same qualities have continued to ensure Liszt's popularity among the vast majority of music lovers whose tastes are founded not in ideology but in immediate experience, and who find his best music beautiful, thrilling, and emotionally compelling. It is only among the intellectuals that, Alan Walker's formidable labors notwithstanding, Liszt's achievement will in all likelihood remain—as it has been since his death 110 years ago—in question.

Stranger in Our Midst
Images of the Jew in Polish Literature
Edited with an Introduction by
HAROLD B. SEGEL
This anthology, the first of its kind, offers translations of poems and prose works by non-Jewish Polish writers. Taken together, the selections represent the complex perceptions about Jews in the Polish community in the period 1530–1990.
11 illus. $49.50 cloth, $17.95 paper
At bookstores, or call (800) 666–2211
CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

* Four pieces for solo piano which are representative of Liszt's innovative late style, *Nuages gris*, *Unstern!-Sinistre*, *La lugubre gondola I*, and *R.W.-Venezia*, have been recorded by Maurizio Pollini (DGG 427 322-2GH); "Via Crucis," the masterpiece of Liszt's old age and the finest of his compositions on religious themes, is available in an excellent recording by the Danish chamber choir Vox Danica, conducted by Ebbe Munk (Danica DCD 8145).

† Fortunately, many early recordings of Liszt's music have been reissued on CD, among the most notable of which are Simon Barere's matchless 1934 performances of *Reminiscences de Don Juan* and the *Rapsodie espagnole*, both of which are part of *Simon Barere: The Complete HMV Recordings, 1934-36* (Appian CDAPR 7001, two CD's); *Alfred Cortot Plays Liszt*, an indispensable collection which includes the great French pianist's 1929 recording of the B Minor Sonata (Pearl GEMM CD 9396); Willem Mengelberg's volatile 1929 performance with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of the symphonic poem *Les Préludes*, currently available in *Mengelberg and the Concertgebouw Orchestra: The Complete Columbia Recordings, Vol. 1* (Pearl GEMM CDS 9018, three CD's); and the Schubert, Verdi, and Wagner transcriptions recorded by the Dutch pianist Egon Petri, Ferruccio Busoni's most distinguished pupil, all of which are collected in *Egon Petri: His Recordings, 1929-1942, Vol. 1* (Appian CDAPR 7023, two CD's).

Haters and Hated

God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting From a Militant Middle East

by Judith Miller

Simon & Schuster. 574 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
David Pryce-Jones

OVER HALF the Arab population in the Middle East is under the age of twenty; illiteracy and unemployment are rising; the proportion of food grown domestically by Arab and Muslim countries is rapidly dwindling, and these countries are already short of water; almost all export earnings derive from a single commodity—oil. As if this were not enough of a formula for ominous instability, many of these countries are also in the grip of Islamism—a somewhat unsatisfactory term for the attempt to harness the religion of Islam to current political purposes.

Apparently retrograde in itself, Islamism also generates violence and what looks to an outsider like self-inflicted injury. This is a phenomenon which Judith Miller set out to explore for herself. As a correspondent for the *New York Times*, she had access to anyone and everyone who could enlighten her. Over a number of years, she attracted friends and useful informants all over the Middle East (she often withholds their real names protectively) and 60 pages of notes testify to diligent preparation for her travels (which for no clear reason seem to have omitted Turkey).

WHAT IS Miller's explanation for the plight of today's Arab world? Basically, it is the historic legacy of absolutism which still remains at the core of every Arab and Muslim

DAVID PRYCE-JONES *is the author of* The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs, *and* The Strange Death of the Soviet Empire, *among other books.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

country in the Middle East. Wherever she goes, she finds that "there [are] no real politics in the Western sense." Instead, a "savage scramble for power" is under way.

In the case of these countries it is misleading, Miller writes, to speak of moderates and liberals versus extremists and fanatics—distinctions borrowed from a Western political vocabulary which do not apply. Absolutism, rather, means an institutionalization throughout society of waste, corruption, lies, and terror; and even opponents of a given regime have no choice but to resort to the methods of their oppressors. In the absence of open mediation by means of elections and representation, the winner seizes the spoils, and the loser can do nothing about it.

Historically speaking, of course, absolutism has its strengths as well as its weaknesses, but at least Judith Miller does not shrink from calling cruel and disgusting deeds by their proper name. In Sudan she witnesses the public hanging of a brave man who had dared to criticize the local interpretation of Islamic law. One Syrian friend offers a forbidding account of the mass murder of local Islamic militants in his home town of Hama at the orders of President Hafez Assad. In Egypt she follows the story of a young member of a terrorist group of Islamists who (according to his widow and family) has been tortured and executed; the police deny it, rather convincingly, and, as is so often the case, the truth cannot be ascertained.

As an American and a woman, Judith Miller judges others according to her own lights. This leads her to overlook at least some of the preconceptions and values that her interlocutors bring to their encounter with her, as well as the role that she assumes in their lives. Absolute rulers in miniature like Yasir Arafat, the Druze chieftain Walid Jumblatt, or the Hezbollah leader Sheik Muhammad Fadlallah seek to enlist her in their causes. Dozens of people, many of them women, want her to publicize their victimization. Although she is usually clear-eyed about all this, only three-quarters of the way through the book is an Arab at last permitted to say the essential thing: that while Westerners think in terms of right and wrong, in Arab culture "these distinctions are less important than what is honorable or shameful."

Honor certifies the winners, no matter by what criminal means they may have won. In this system, people come to excuse and even to admire their oppressors. The loser, no matter the justice of his case, has to carry a stigma of shame, which is often unbearable. Even routine aspects of human activity are thus invested with high and immediate drama. These ancient and defining Mediterranean values ratify hierarchy and block equality and democracy.

Hence the blind alley of Islamism. Contrary to Westerners, Judith Miller among them, Islamists believe that the plight of the Arabs is due not to the legacy of absolutism but to the rulers of the moment, seen as traitors to a heritage which once ensured power and success. Islamists are all too painfully aware that their people are now deprived of freedom and dignity, and that national identity and even independence are under threat. But to this they respond that the model of the past has only to be applied and all will be well. And they add a crucial rider: in addition to, or in collusion with, present-day Middle East rulers, it is the West—together with its cat's-paw, Israel—that is intent upon deliberately destroying Islam and humiliating the faithful. Islamism rationalizes the need to wipe out this humiliation, and the collective shame it evokes, with whatever degree of violence may be required.

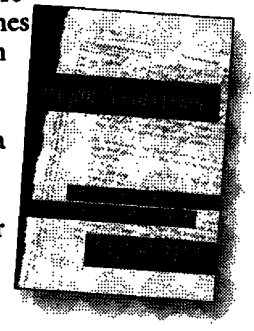
Insensitive to this element and its origins in culture, Judith Miller assumes somewhat patronizingly that everyone must in the end come around to Western norms of reason and to the problem-solving mentality. But haters and hated cannot, in

Raul Hilberg's long-awaited memoir is "that rarity, a contemporary autobiography that is actually too short....One is left wanting more."
—Kirkus Reviews

The Politics of Memory

The Journey of a Holocaust Historian
BY RAUL HILBERG

In this poignant memoir by the master of Holocaust historians, Hilberg recalls his fateful decision to study the Holocaust as his life's work, and the barriers he met in publishing his monumental *Destruction of the European Jews.* Attacked by those who refused to believe that the Jews were sometimes less than heroes, Hilberg fought a "thirty-year war" for truth and against the abuse of his work by others. *The Politics of Memory* brings full circle an enterprise of scholarship that has been in many ways a terrible calling.



A SELECTION OF THE JEWISH BOOK CLUB

Just published

Ivan R. Dee, Publisher
Chicago 60622

At your bookseller, or order toll-free 1-800-634-0226 with a major credit card.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LEVY ON LAW

THREE BOOKS BY PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING AUTHOR LEONARD W. LEVY

A License to Steal
The Forfeiture of Property
"The best and most complete account to date of the controversy surrounding forfeiture of property as a device to combat crime. . . . [A] provocative and important book."
—James W. Ely, Jr., Vanderbilt University
288 pp. $29.95 cloth

Blasphemy
Verbal Offense against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie
"Levy's curiosity ranges far and wide, and his erudite explorations take us beyond blasphemy and into perennial disputes involving sedition, heresy, obscenity, profanity, nonconformity, subversion, conspiracy and disturbing the peace."
—*New York Times Book Review*
700 pp. $18.95 paper

The Establishment Clause
Religion and the First Amendment
Second Edition, Revised
"America's foremost historian of law provides a profoundly intelligent contribution to an issue that regularly gets confused in the hands of superficial commentators. . . . A powerful argument."—*Philadelphia Inquirer*
300 pp. $34.95 cloth / $14.95 paper

at bookstores or by toll-free order

The University of North Carolina Press

Chapel Hill
Phone (800) 848-6224
Fax (800) 272-6817
http://sunsite.unc.edu/uncpress/

fact, meet on equal terms. To Islamists, civil democracy, in whatever version, implies surrender, and the imposition of something alien. What might look to Judith Miller like irrational frenzy is to an Islamist a reasonable and necessary defense of tradition.

Still, although the ends of Islamism appear to be uniform, the means and practices vary and even conflict. In Saudi Arabia and Sudan, Islamism serves to legitimize, respectively, a royal dictatorship and a military general; teachers and preachers of Islamic law are in both cases part of the security apparatus. In Algeria and Egypt, by contrast, Islamists are seeking to overthrow the present regimes; whenever the balance of forces in these two countries encourages Islamists to go for broke, the killing becomes widespread in what are in effect undeclared civil wars.

Elsewhere still, Islam has become an instrument for gathering political support, as lately in Turkey and even within Israel proper, whose Arab citizens have been quick to see that mobilization behind Islam can win favors from a government morally prevented from using force against its own citizens. And then there is Iran, the one country where Islamists are in power and where the Ayatollah Khomeini's experiment at putting the clock back a thousand years still sputters on, held in check only by the historically well-honed ability of Iranians to resist arbitrary restrictions and to remain their friendly and lively selves.

As presently self-defined, nothing can come of Islamism except more absolutism. Its leaders have no constructive ideas about politics or religion, and no practical programs above the level of welfare relief. They offer only an extension of everything which has so far prevented Arabs and Iranians from building a society that accepts the rule of law and is capable of resolving conflicts of interest without violence. No wonder Judith Miller comes to feel baffled regret at what she finds in today's "militant Middle East."

Horn of Plenty?

How Many People Can the Earth Support?
by Joel E. Cohen
Norton. 532 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Charles T. Rubin

FOR DECADES, debate about overpopulation has been frozen at two poles. In one camp are what have been called "neo-Malthusians," pessimists who believe that the world already holds more people than it can sustain, and that as environmental degradation proceeds, excess population will likely be pruned by disease, disorder, starvation, and war. In the other camp are people whom some critics have labeled "Cornucopians," those who observe that in many locations rapid population growth has been consistent with broad improvement in the conditions of life; they maintain that thanks to the self-correcting mechanism of markets, and to human ingenuity, scarcity can be fended off indefinitely.

In this debate, the neo-Malthusians' position is by far the more popular, even if intellectually theirs is much the harder row to hoe. Paul Ehrlich, perhaps the most vocal exponent of this camp and the author of the runaway best-seller, *The Population Bomb* (1968), has been repeatedly proved wrong in his predictions; the 1970's, 80's, and half the 90's have come and gone with-

CHARLES T. RUBIN, *associate professor of political science at Duquesne University, is the author of* The Green Crusade: Rethinking the Roots of Environmentalism *(Free Press).*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out a sign of anything resembling his frightening scenarios of destruction. On the other side, perhaps the most outspoken of the Cornucopians is the economist Julian Simon, the author of, among other books, *The Ultimate Resource* (1981). Simon's contention that scarcity does not set "limits to growth" has yet to be contradicted by the final arbiter: history itself.

Nevertheless, the past cannot guarantee the future, and the earth's continuing ability to support a burgeoning humanity remains an issue of burning import, with implications for other contentious matters ranging from environmental regulation to the role of government in family planning. All the more reason, then, to welcome this new book by Joel E. Cohen, the head of the Laboratory of Populations at Rockefeller University and the author of a significant body of work on topics lying at the intersection of ecology, mathematics, and social affairs.

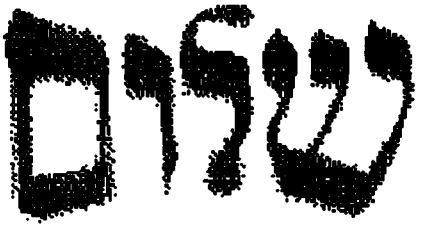
Cohen's argument in *How Many People Can the Earth Support?* is divided into two major parts. First, he lays out in great detail what is and—just as pertinently—what is not known about past population growth, and how we reached our present record level of 5.7 billion souls; along the way, he examines and criticizes the various projections of growth produced by demographers at institutions like the United Nations and the World Bank. In the second part, Cohen discusses the meaning of "carrying capacity," or the number of organisms that can be supported by a given resource base. Bringing together his conclusions from both sections, he then analyzes a range of estimates for how many human beings the planet can sustain.

Cohen sums up his fundamental finding simply enough: the "future of human population growth is uncertain." Rather an underwhelming conclusion, one would think—were it not for Cohen's powerful demonstration of how strongly such a posture of intellectual humility runs against the tide. In his ground-clearing analysis, written with critical intelligence, clarity, and wit, he not only puts before us the widely varying estimates that demographers have hitherto set forth but also exposes the unarticulated or insufficiently defended assumptions upon which their projections rest.

Absent a major catastrophe, writes Cohen, the only thing of which we can be sure is that the number of human beings will continue to grow for some time to come. By how much, how fast, and where cannot be stated with any confidence. Among other uncertainties, population growth depends on how many children future generations will want

Ben-Gurion's Spy
The Story of the Political Scandal That Shaped Modern Israel
Shabtai Teveth
"Brilliantly conveys the cut-and-thrust of Israel's turbulent politics and the spectacular clashes of its titans. This is no dry narrative. Teveth's telling is peopled with living, breathing people, seething with the elemental drives of ambition, envy, love, and lust.... Was it a rogue operation? Teveth reaches his own conclusions judiciously, weighing the evidence piece by piece. But more important, he demonstrates how the politicians and the press turned the case into the touchstone of Israeli politics, eroding public confidence in the leaders, the army, and David Ben-Gurion himself, in a way that would change Israeli politics forever."
—Martin Kramer, Georgetown University
296 pages / $29.95, cloth

Rescue as Resistance
How Jewish Organizations Fought the Holocaust in France
Lucien Lazare
"Three out of four Jews living in France in 1940 survived the murderous onslaught of the Nazi occupation. With a keen eye for the diversity of circumstance in which the victims found themselves, Lucien Lazare makes a powerful case that Jews themselves had a vital role to play in rescue operations, particularly Jewish children. Highly recommended as an antidote to notions of Jewish passivity, this book stresses the inventive, divergent, painstaking, risky, and often heroic strategies for survival adopted by many Jews in wartime France."
—Michael R. Marrus, University of Toronto
352 pages / $32.50, cloth



Now in paper:
The Defeat of the Mind
Alain Finkielkraut
"In France his books have contributed to a fresh appreciation of Enlightenment ideals as the best modern hope for Jews, for French citizens, and for human beings as such."
—*The New York Times Book Review*
187 pages / $15.00, paper

With a Foreword by Paul Berman
The Jews
History, Memory, and the Present
Pierre Vidal-Naquet
"Erudite and provocative essays that examine the synthesis of Jewish history and memory."
—*Kirkus Reviews*
368 pages / $29.50, cloth

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/cup
Columbia University Press
At bookstores.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

LOST JEWS
The Struggle for Identity Today
Emma Klein

"[Lost Jews is] provocative in the context of American debates over Jewish identity and continuity...[it] is actually optimistic regarding chances for Jewish renewal."
—Washington Post Book World

"Klein's work is most interesting in showing the similarities and differences in identity concerns in the U.S. and Europe."
—Booklist

1996 / 288 pp.
ISBN 0-312-12890-8 $35.00 cl.

Scholarly & Reference Division
257 Park Avenue South
New York, NY 10010
1-800-221-7945

Out-of-Print
Books
of Jewish Interest
Bought & Sold
Catalogue upon request

Schwartz Judaica
Dept. C
1934 Pentuckett Ave.
San Diego, CA 92104-5732

Phone: 619 232-5888
Fax: 619 233-5833
Schwartz@cts.com

to have, and demographers have never enjoyed notable success in predicting the contours of family size.

Uncertainty about global carrying capacity is, necessarily, just as great. Human beings are not like other animals, who in the face of limits on their resources must migrate or die. As Cohen and many others before him have pointed out, we can develop technologies that extend the availability of resources, or substitute new for exhausted ones. Moreover, limits to carrying capacity cannot be ascertained without knowing both how people want to live and how capable they are of achieving their goals. Such desires and abilities, of course, change over time and vary in different circumstances, again making estimates of carrying capacity highly contingent.

GIVEN THIS indeterminacy, what kinds of policies would Cohen have us adopt? He evaluates the now-traditional arsenal of social planners: increased access to contraception, economic development, "empowering women, educating men; doing everything at once." Although he endorses them all, he does not repose much confidence in our ability to know which if any of these methods works best, or to understand the tradeoffs among them. He therefore suggests such modest preliminary steps as better collection of data, refined economic accounting, more research into the interactions of population, culture, and economics, greater rationalization of the systems that make difficult distributive decisions, and a more expansive sense of the ethical demands of "mutual aid."

These suggestions make sense as far as they go. But if, as is implicitly conveyed by Cohen's book, population problems ultimately revolve around such questions as the equitable distribution of resources, trust in government, and the shape of daily life, then they recapitulate all the stuff of political dispute for as long as there has been politics. While social scientists have long sought to exclude values from "rational" discourse, Cohen's book shows that this cannot be done in any rational discussion of population. A growth rate that might horrify a Chinese bureaucrat in charge of family-planning might be found desirable by, say, an Israeli government minister of housing and development.

There is not one "population problem." Rather, there are "population problems," as many and varied as the lives that people seek in common. For providing a wealth of illustrations of this fundamental insight—not to mention for debunking a good deal of shaky and shoddy scholarship—Cohen's *How Many People Can the Earth Support?* deserves to be widely read.

Beyond Good and Evil

Nietzsche:
The Ethics of an Immoralist
by Peter Berkowitz
Harvard. 313 pp. $35.00

Reviewed by
Adam Schulman

IN *The Closing of the American Mind*, the late Allan Bloom told with incomparable clarity the story of how the deadly continental ideas of nihilism and relativism had crossed the Atlantic to find a home in American democracy under the mild guise of tolerance, pluralism, and openness. The most profound and also the most ferocious of the European thinkers who were defanged and domesticated in this way was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Our current moral language of values, "life-styles," self, and creativity is merely a watered-down remnant of Nietzsche's unrestrained

ADAM SCHULMAN *is a tutor at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assault on reason and morality in the name of value-creation and will to power. Bloom traced the impoverishment of the American soul to this vulgarized revolution in values, and counseled, among other things, a renewed inquiry into the philosophic thought which inspired it.

In an important contribution to that inquiry, Peter Berkowitz, who teaches political philosophy at Harvard, has now come forward to show that, despite his virulent attack on traditional morality, Nietzsche himself was not simply the nihilist and relativist he is often taken for. In particular, Berkowitz takes aim at a new orthodoxy in Nietzsche scholarship that focuses narrowly on his claims that reason and morality are without foundation and that all truth is relative or "perspectival."

Recent critics, says Berkowitz, have been too quick to celebrate Nietzsche as a "founding father of postmodernism, . . . a seminal figure in the elaboration of the politics of identity, difference, and self-making." Without denying the relativist strain in Nietzsche's thought, Berkowitz argues that it coexists, however uneasily, with a dependence on traditional notions of truth, moral virtue, and reason. Berkowitz's title phrase, "the ethics of an immoralist," is meant to convey the idea that Nietzsche's critique of morality is itself guided by a "higher morality, a particular vision of the best life."

Through a close reading of six of Nietzsche's books, Berkowitz aims to show that Nietzsche's thought is formed by a "contest of extremes," a pervasive tension between his assumption that morality is merely an artifact of the human will and his conviction that there is a binding rank-order of desires, types of human beings, and forms of life. According to Berkowitz, while Nietzsche strove without success to overcome that tension, his failure is nonetheless instructive, for it

> powerfully suggests that the distinctions between just and unjust, noble and shameful, and good and bad are hallmarks of our humanity and cannot be sustained if their foundation in nature, reason, or revelation is altogether abolished.

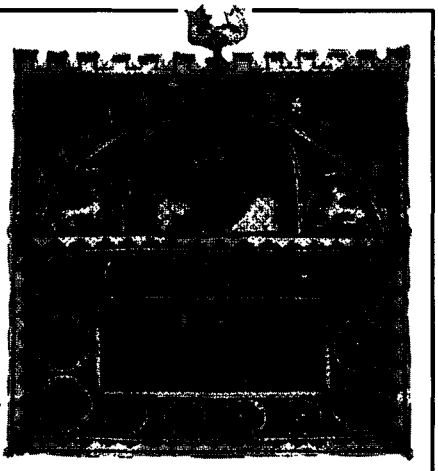
Berkowitz thus presents Nietzsche as at once the most radical exponent and the most trenchant critic of the modern philosophic project which aspires to unconditional human freedom from all necessity, including any external moral order. If Berkowitz's "ethical" reading of Nietzsche is correct, Nietzsche's postmodern disciples will have good reason to reconsider and perhaps abandon their flirtation with value-relativism and self-making.

Berkowitz has no difficulty refuting the fashionable view of Nietzsche as radical perspectivist. He acknowledges that Nietzsche's earliest books already contain the "tragic insight" that human life is "an endless stupid game," as well as doctrines asserting "the sovereignty of becoming, the fluidity of all concepts, types, and species, the lack of any cardinal distinction between man and animal." And Nietzsche's later dictum, "God is dead," represents, in Berkowitz's words, "the discovery that morality lacks a foundation," i.e., that "the total character of the world is in all eternity chaos."

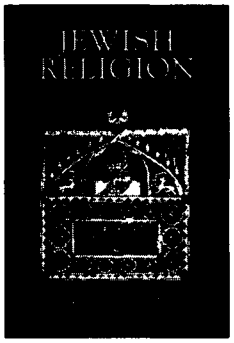
Nevertheless, says Berkowitz, "one does not have to probe deeply to discover manifestations of the traditional dimension of Nietzsche's thought." In fact, assertions about truth, happiness, and the best way to live abound on every page of Nietzsche's writings, and only mulish obstinacy on the part of his academic critics could lead them to conclude that he simply espoused the

"A remarkable achievement... a fresh, original, interesting, readable, and profoundly personal testament. The coverage is most impressive."
—Nicholas de Lange

"A wonderful work which combines [Jacobs's] great knowledge of Judaism and Jewish thought with his ability to make understandable complex and important issues in Judaism.... Dr Jacobs has achieved a uniformity of style which is illuminating, refreshing, and authoritative, but not condescending."
—Michael Neiditch



The Jewish Religion
A Companion



Sweeping in scope and based on impeccable scholarship, this volume's 750 alphabetical entries illuminate virtually every facet of Jewish heritage, from the Old Testament, to the great Jewish thinkers, to popular customs, rituals, and religious services.

$39.95, 544 pp.

At better bookstores. Or call 1-800-451-7556 (M-F, 9-5 EST)
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

relativity of all beliefs. Far from preaching nihilism, Nietzsche taught that nihilism (the belief that "nothing is true, everything is permitted") is a deadly sickness from which mankind must recover.

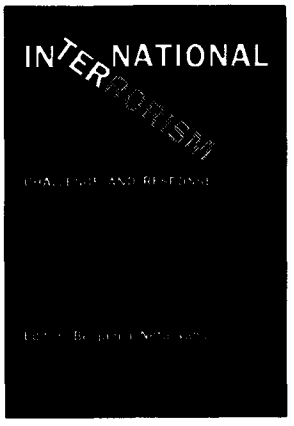
Indeed, Berkowitz argues that Nietzsche's ethical stance is a direct outgrowth of his "immoralism," that is, his truthfulness in acknowledging that all attempts to find a ground for morality have failed, and must fail. Nietzsche's recognition that God is dead need not, according to Berkowitz, plunge us into torpor or despair but rather generates "specific and severe moral or practical imperatives," whose clarification Nietzsche views as his central task. These imperatives, felt only by the strongest and noblest souls, dictate the creation of new life-sustaining values, and culminate in the obligation to master necessity by becoming gods.

In Berkowitz's view, however, Nietzsche was well aware that this new "ethics of creativity" was deeply problematic. For how can one maintain that all values are man-made and yet still believe in a rank-order of human beings, the highest of whom are governed by inescapable moral imperatives? This fundamental difficulty, according to Berkowitz, appears to be resolved in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's crowning effort to redeem mankind from the death of God by radically emancipating and empowering the creative will. His Zarathustra seeks to become a god and to master fate by consciously willing "the eternal recurrence of the same." In Zarathustra's self-deification, the human will becomes sovereign over past, present, and future, and the distinction between knowing and making disappears.

But, Berkowitz argues, Zarathustra's apparent reconciliation of the extremes in Nietzsche's thought is in fact incoherent and unworkable. Zarathustra's quest for supreme knowledge, freedom, and mastery is, says Berkowitz, unmasked by Nietzsche himself as "a swindle," "a vain delusion," "an ignominious betrayal," driven by envy, lust, and the poisonous spirit of revenge.

WHY WOULD Nietzsche, in the book he judged to be his most profound and far-sighted, make a mockery of his own teachings? According to Berkowitz, the disclosure of Zarathustra's humiliating failure is proof that Nietzsche ultimately obeyed an imperative more fundamental than the ethics of creativity. For the very willingness to face up to the truth, however debilitating, is, for Nietzsche, the sign of a rare virtue, at once moral and intellectual, which he calls the "intellectual

BENJAMIN Netanyahu



INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM - Challenge and Response

"Distinguished participants—drawn internationally from academic communities, government, the fields of law and journalism, and the military—express well-considered opinions on the essence of terrorism, the sociological forces behind it, its supporters (including certain governments), current and future threats presented by terrorism, how to alleviate them, and the collaborating role of the media."—*Booklist*
ISBN: 0-87855-894-2 (paper) 383 pp. $19.95/£12.95

Order from your bookstore or direct from the publisher.

transaction

Transaction Publishers
Department BN96A
Rutgers—The State University
New Brunswick, NJ 08903
or call 908/445-2280
or fax 908/445-3138
E-mail trans@transactionpub.com

In the United Kingdom and Europe:
Transaction Publishers (UK) Ltd.
Representation and Distribution, Ltd.
244A London Road
Hadleigh, Essex SS7 2DE
United Kingdom

transaction

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

conscience." This virtue, also called "probity" or "intellectual integrity," is, Berkowitz writes, the primary *moral* impulse that gives birth to and governs Nietzsche's thinking. And this same probity compelled him to reveal, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the falsehood of his own most cherished doctrines.

Amid the wreckage of Nietzsche's other teachings, Berkowitz considers the intellectual conscience the one sound doctrine that survives as his lasting legacy. Indeed, Berkowitz concludes that fidelity to the intellectual conscience demands that we ourselves treat with skepticism Nietzsche's claims that God is dead and that the will is supreme, and he recommends a return to "thinking that affirms that nature, reason, or revelation supplies moral and political standards."

Berkowitz's ethical reading of Nietzsche is open to a number of serious, though hardly fatal, objections.

For one thing, his account of the "ethics of creativity" does not entirely accord with what Nietzsche himself has to say about the creative impulse. Berkowitz tells us that Nietzsche's "philosopher of the future" is obligated to create new values, and that his "superman" feels a *moral* imperative to make himself a god. But such acts of creation and self-deification are, according to Nietzsche, merely eruptions of "the will to power," i.e., the instinct felt by every living thing to grow, to spread, to dominate, to discharge its strength, "not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power." Berkowitz does not adequately justify his insistence that such assertions of the will to power are inherently moral phenomena.

For another thing, in praising Nietzsche for his probity, Berkowitz does not give sufficient weight to Nietzsche's own devastating critique of the moral disposition toward truth. Though Nietzsche does confess fidelity to the intellectual con-

JEWISH HISTORY, JEWISH HERSTORY

THE JEWS OF CHICAGO
From Shtetl to Suburb
IRVING CUTLER

Vividly told and richly illustrated with more than 160 photographs, *The Jews of Chicago* is the fascinating story of the cultural, religious, fraternal, economic, and everyday life of Chicago's Jews. The first comprehensive history of Chicago's Jewish population in seventy years, it brings to life the people, events, neighborhoods, and institutions that helped shape today's Jewish community.

Each neighborhood history is intertwined with representative biographical vignettes of some of Chicago's best-known figures: Edna Ferber, Saul Bellow, Benny Goodman, Mandy Patinkin, Mel Torme, Ann Landers, and many others well known and not so well known.

Illus. Cloth, $29.95

ESCAPE FROM SOBIBOR
RICHARD RASHKE

"Brilliantly reconstructs the degradation and drama of Sobibor. . . . A memorable and moving saga, full of anger and anguish, a reminder never to forget." — Jordan E. Cohn, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"This moving and angry book deserves to be read." — Susan Osnos, *Washington Post*

Poignant in its honesty and grim in its details, *Escape from Sobibor* offers stunning proof of resistance—in this case successful—by victims of the Holocaust. The smallest of the extermination camps operated by Nazi Germany during World War II, Sobibor also was the scene of the war's biggest prisoner escape. Richard Rashke's interviews with eighteen of those who survived provide the foundation for this volume.

Paper, $16.95

ACTIVE VOICES
Women in Jewish Culture
MAURIE SACKS

"A significant contribution. . . What unifies it is the concern it shows for the Jewish woman's place in the social hierarchy, the official terms of her social roles and statuses, and her negotiation of them. There is really good reading here, ranging from riveting to fascinating to solid and interesting." — Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, YIVO Institute for Jewish Studies, New York.

Unique in its multidisciplinary approach to Jewish women's lives and perceptions through time and space, this collection considers women in Europe, Israel, and North America. It includes the teller of tales and the singer of songs, the Jewish woman at prayer and as ritual organizer, also religious leader, writer, and author of ideas, as well as the modern woman struggling to find her place in a post-modern Jewish world.

Cloth, $34.95; Paper, $12.95

WRITING MOTHERS, WRITING DAUGHTERS
Tracing the Maternal in Stories by American Jewish Women
JANET HANDLER BURSTEIN

"A fascinating, innovative, and gracefully written study." — Joyce Antler, coeditor of *The Challenge of Feminist Biography*

A refreshing look at the Jewish mother through her own and her daughter's eyes: this is what Janet Burstein offers as she takes readers on a journey through popular twentieth-century texts, examining mother-daughter portrayals by Edna Ferber, Vivian Gornick, Grace Paley, Cynthia Ozick, Rosellen Brown, and dozens of others.

Cloth, $34.95; Paper, $14.95

800/545-4703
Illinois
http://www.uiuc.edu/providers/uipress
University of Illinois Press • 1325 South Oak Street • Champaign, IL 61820

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

science and admits that such devotion to the truth is at bottom a moral and even a religious impulse, he makes this confession under the heading, "How we too are still pious," and not triumphantly but in a spirit of self-criticism and doubt. In his enthusiasm for the intellectual conscience, Berkowitz runs the risk of ignoring Nietzsche's own warning:

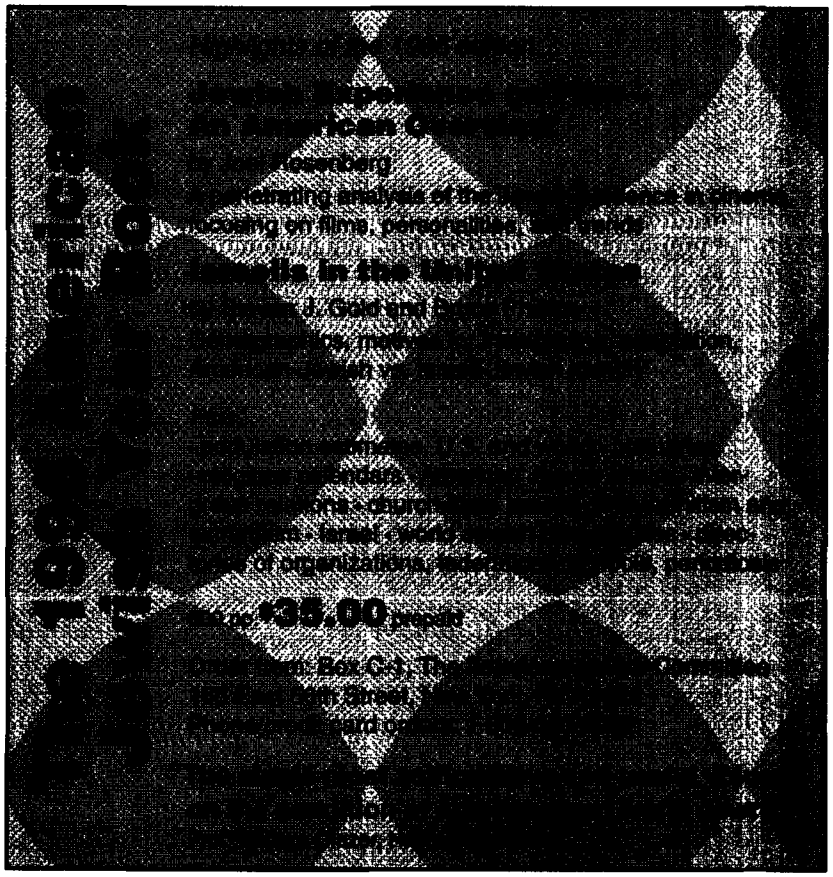
> Probity, love of truth, love of wisdom, sacrifice for knowledge, heroism of the truthful—they have something that swells one's pride . . . . But this too belongs to the old mendacious pomp, junk, and gold dust of unconscious human vanity.

Nietzsche is quite explicit that those who have the courage to live "beyond good and evil" will ultimately abandon even the will to truth, as the last vestige of moralism.

Finally, Berkowitz's attempt to show that Nietzsche intended *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a "failed thought-experiment" is less a fair-minded interpretation of the book than an incessant and one-sided diatribe, leveling every conceivable censure against the fictitious Zarathustra in order to denigrate the principles he represents. Whether or not Berkowitz's disdain for Zarathustra's ideas is justified, he does not persuade the reader that Nietzsche would have shared his critique.

IN ANY event, these objections do not undermine Berkowitz's valuable insight that the careful study of Nietzsche can be an effective antidote to the seductive appeal of "Nietzschean" ideas—if not precisely in the way Berkowitz suggests.

At the end of this book, he points out that Nietzsche's assertion of the death of God, the premise on which his entire project is based, is merely an unsupported conjecture, and a highly questionable one. Berkowitz does not say what led Nietzsche to adopt such a radical atheism, but perhaps the answer lies in the intellectual conscience, Nietzsche's quasi-moral substitute for what the Greeks called philosophy or love of wisdom. One who interprets the love of wisdom as a moral resolve to face up to the harsh truth, whatever its cost, might well end up embracing atheism just to prove he has the strength to do without the comfort of religion. Yet such an atheism born of probity would not seem to differ from that "belief in unbelief even to the point of martyrdom" which Nietzsche rejected as nihilism. In this sense, Nietzsche himself supplies the materials for a critique of Nietzsche.



Value Added

Pop Internationalism

by Paul Krugman

MIT. 221 pp. $22.50

Reviewed by
Christopher Caldwell

PAUL KRUGMAN—a self-described liberal, an adviser to the 1992 Clinton presidential campaign, and someone who was once thought to have the inside track to a job as head of the White House Council of Economic Advisers—ranks in the handful of top international economists in the world. He is also the author of works that have rubbed strongly against the grain of economic orthodoxy, questioning, for example, classical theories of trade that had gone unchallenged since the English economist David Ricardo formulated them in the second decade of the 19th century.

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL *is senior writer at the* Weekly Standard.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Iconoclast though he may be, Krugman is in one sense a straight-arrow traditionalist: he believes you cannot begin to question the laws of economics until you at least know the ABC's. This is a test which, he has never been afraid to say, many within his profession, and many others around it, have consistently failed, being caught up rather in self-promotion, power-seeking, and bald-faced intellectual dishonesty. The "pop internationalists," Krugman's designation for apostles of a variety of false nostrums about international trade, are particular offenders.

This is one of the more forceful attacks written by an academic in recent years. Krugman's list of those peddling specious doctrines includes Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (formerly a lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School), Lester Thurow of MIT, the journalists James Fallows and Robert Kuttner, think-tank denizens like Clyde Prestowitz and Edward Luttwak, and presidential idea-man Ira Magaziner: for Krugman, phonies, con-artists, liars, and pseudo-intellectuals all. He trundles out their books, each with its *ex-cathedra* tone, its military metaphors, its hubristic policy prescriptions, and finds a common thread, or lack of thread:

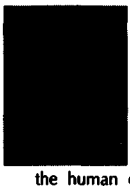
> a complete absence of anything that looks like the kind of international trade theory that academic economists teach. . . . It is not a matter of a lack of familiarity with the latest wrinkles in research. Rather, nothing of international trade theory as economists know it—from Ricardo on—is in these books.

One prominent theme of pop internationalism, according to Krugman, is "competitiveness," a term that has gained wide currency but that is close to meaningless in Ricardian economics. Thus, Jacques Delors of the European Community gives long speeches on how "competition" from lower-wage economies has caused high French unemployment—it has not—in order to avoid confronting the wasteful French welfare state. And President Clinton characterizes the United States as akin to a corporation in a competitive marketplace—it is not—in order to justify a number of his own economic policies. "The growing obsession in most advanced nations with international competitiveness should be seen," writes Krugman, "not as a well-founded concern but as a view held in the face of overwhelming contrary evidence."

KRUGMAN IS at his best in identifying dubious scenarios of disaster, which he then reduces to their underlying illogic. He starts with Lester Thurow's claim that our trade deficit with Japan has been responsible for a 6-percent drop in real wages over the last two decades. Granting, for argument's sake, Thurow's wild assertion that a million manufacturing jobs have been lost and that the slots which replaced them pay 30 percent less, Krugman shows by simple arithmetic that even such a momentous shift would depress the wage rate not by 6 but by 0.3 percent—putting Thurow off by a factor of twenty.

Krugman similarly demolishes the widespread view (purveyed by Robert Kuttner, among others) that trade with low-wage countries like Mexico is responsible for American wage stagnation (shades of Jacques Delors in France). This may be possible in theory, Krugman allows, but practice is something else. For one thing, the average weighted wages of America's trading partners (excluding oil producers) are now up to 88 percent of U.S. wages. For another, in 1990—a typical recent year—the industrial nations spent only 1.2 percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on manufactured goods from low-wage,

QUALITY BOOKS
FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK.

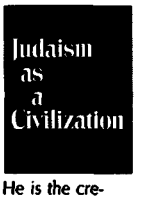


ETHICS OF RESPONSIBILITY
Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics
Walter S. Wurzburger
Walter Wurzburger makes a strong argument for the role of the human conscience in determining right and wrong, good and evil—that cultivation of an ethical personality is a religious imperative. *Ethics* bridges the gap between liberal Jewish philosophy and modern Orthodoxy.
144 pages. Cloth, $20.00

RENEWING THE COVENANT
A Theology for the Postmodern Jew
Eugene B. Borowitz
Widely regarded as one of Judaism's leading liberal theologians, Borowitz presents his long awaited version of our central Jewish concern: his theology of contemporary Jewish duty.
320 pages. Cloth, $29.95 Paper, $18.95

SACRED FRAGMENTS
Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew
Neil Gillman
National Jewish Book Award
Rabbi Neil Gillman addresses the most difficult theological questions of our time and, retaining the sacred fragments of Judaism, he urges readers to rethink and reformulate what they believe.
296 pages. Paper, $14.95

JUDAISM AS A CIVILIZATION
Mordecai Kaplan
With a new introduction by Arnold Eisen
Mordecai Kaplan is regarded as one of the twentieth century's foremost philosophers and interpreters of Jewish thought. He is the creator, and for generations, the guiding spirit of the reconstructionist philosophy of Judaism.
640 pages. Paper, $29.95



Mention this ad when you order and get 20% off these or any book!

Call for a Free Catalog • Over 200 English Lanaguage Books for Children and Adults
THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY • 800-234-3151 • FAX: (215) 564-6640

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

newly industrializing countries. Writers like Kuttner are thus attempting to explain one economic phenomenon, in this case wage stagnation, by means of a factor that leaves 98.8 percent of the economy untouched.

Secretary Reich has pushed a similar line with a somewhat different spin: the U.S., he asserts, must now compete with low-wage countries for access to a limited investment-capital pool. But Krugman knocks down this argument as well, noting that in the 1980's, capital was flowing *out* of the third world, and since 1990 the industrialized world has invested a mere $100 billion in emerging markets out of $18 trillion in Western GDP and $60 trillion in capital stocks. A capital outflow of $100 billion could have depressed wages in the advanced countries by, at worst, 0.15 percent.

Pop internationalists who wail about nonproblems like these have, not surprisingly, developed solutions for the ills they misidentify, usually entailing one or another government program. Though in general open-minded on the subject of government intervention, Krugman displays little patience with the particular policies advanced by the targets of his wrath. In particular, he issues a devastating attack on Reich's and Magaziner's call for government investment in "high-value-added" sectors of the economy. For them, "high-value-added" is a synonym for high-tech, but in fact high-tech industries like aerospace and electronics fall *below* the manufacturing-sector average in returns per worker, which is the true meaning of "high-value-added." The highest value-added sectors of the American economy are petroleum refining and cigarettes, hardly industries which American taxpayers need to fund.

Krugman is slightly more sympathetic to the call by Laura D'Andrea Tyson, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, for subsidies to create a comparative advantage in international trade—his own work, after all, has helped create the intellectual underpinnings for such an approach. But he cautions that even the most successful of such programs, including Europe's Airbus, will have only a negligible impact on economic performance. Even if the United States could design a program to increase the size of its high-tech sector by a third, and if that program were to work effectively, GDP would increase by a puny .07 percent before the costs of the program were factored in.

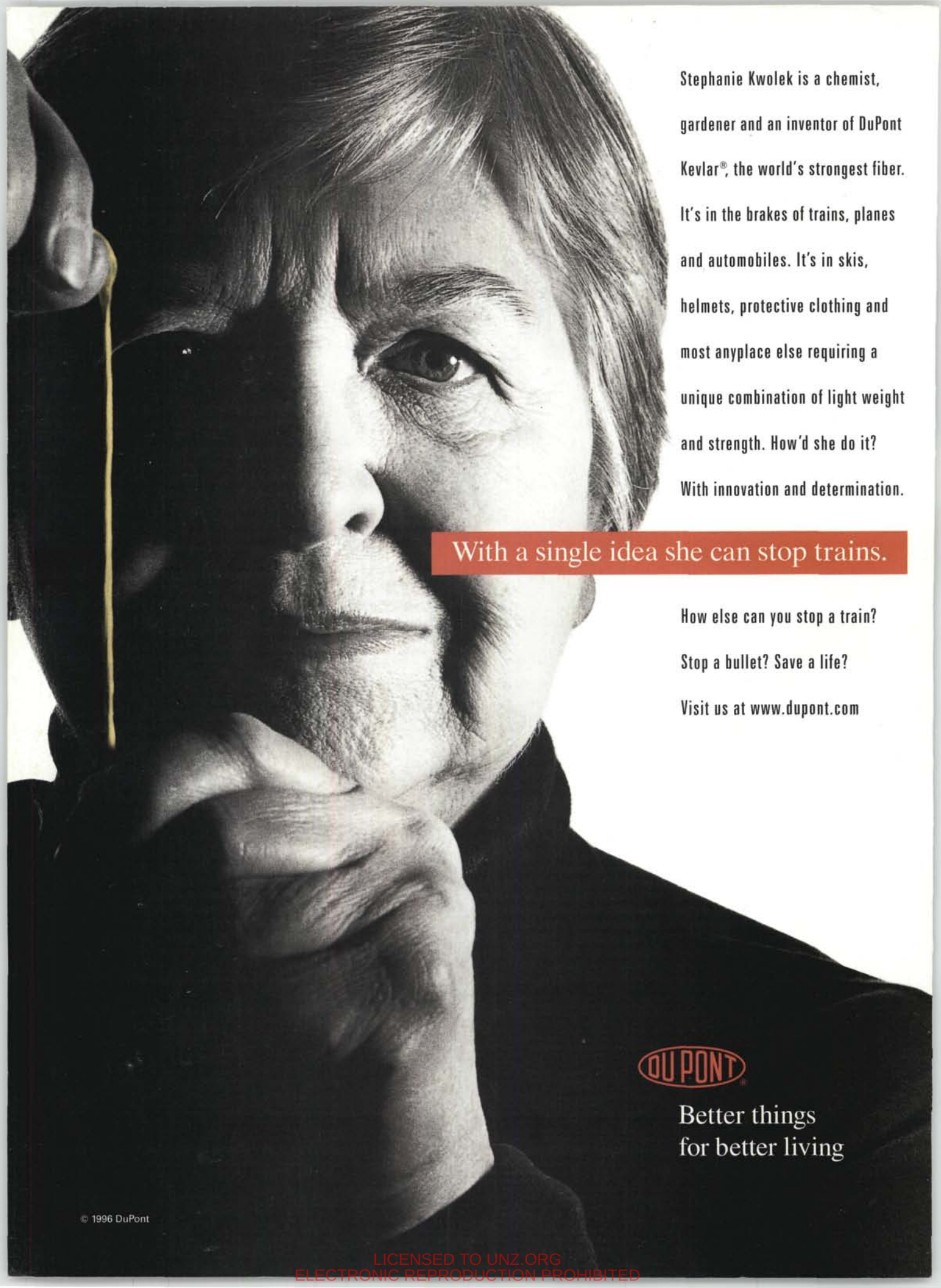
THIS IS a frequent conclusion to Krugman's arguments: when one crunches the numbers for the various disaster scenarios about which the pop internationalists have warned, the actual economic effects turn out to range from minimal to minuscule to nonexistent. As for Krugman's own approach, its cornerstone is that economic productivity "is determined by a complex array of factors, most of them unreachable by any likely government policy." In other words, the beginning of economic wisdom is recognition of the market's complexity and intractability. As Krugman devastatingly shows in *Pop Internationalism*, this elementary and indispensable truth seems to have gone out of fashion among some of the most visible practitioners of the dismal science.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Virgin territory. He's not one who's comfortable with boundaries. Publisher. Record mogul. Airline owner. He's been there. Done that. Turning one risky business venture after another into a multibillion dollar empire. And along the way, he's parlayed his informal style and love of adventure into one of the most powerful brand names in marketing history. *Virgin*. The promise of value and good fun. And when he's not busy pinching market share from bigger brands, you can find him plotting a way to land in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. For the fourth time. **Richard Branson picked up his first copy of Forbes aboard a trans-Atlantic flight in 1972.**

Forbes

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Stephanie Kwolek is a chemist, gardener and an inventor of DuPont Kevlar®, the world's strongest fiber. It's in the brakes of trains, planes and automobiles. It's in skis, helmets, protective clothing and most anyplace else requiring a unique combination of light weight and strength. How'd she do it? With innovation and determination.

With a single idea she can stop trains.

How else can you stop a train? Stop a bullet? Save a life? Visit us at www.dupont.com

DUPONT

Better things for better living

© 1996 DuPont

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED